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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**PLAN COLOMBIA: HOW U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE  
AFFECTS REGIONAL BALANCES OF POWER**

by

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June 2004

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BALANCES OF POWER**

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## ABSTRACT

Scholars are usually attracted to South America because of the characterization of this zone of the Western Hemisphere as a zone with a “long peace”. However, almost 200 years after achieving independence from Spain and Portugal, some countries are still facing unsolved territorial and boundary disputes. Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to assess the importance the balance of power has in the inter-state relationships in the Western Hemisphere.

This thesis argues that Plan Colombia is creating an imbalance of military power between Colombia and Venezuela and this balance is important to their relations. Three possible explanations are used to explore the relations between these two countries, which are democratic peace, balance of power, and spiral model. The major conclusion of this thesis is that the implementation of U.S. policy in the region is creating an imbalance of power, and that the situation could lead the unbalanced country to increase military capabilities. The long history of misperceptions of the *capabilities* and *intentions* of the adversary could provide the dynamics that might trigger a war. Therefore, this U.S. policy is likely to increase tensions and instability in the dyad.

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. OBJECTIVE**

Since 1964, Colombia has been engaged in an internal war with leftist insurgents. For more than 40 years, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN) have continued to attack democratic institutions and civil society to achieve their goals. Narcotics trafficking, extortion and kidnapping now fuel these groups, and are a direct threat to Colombian democratic institutions and their ability to meet the people's economic and social needs.

United States policy has been to give assistance to Colombia that is directed solely at the fight against narcotics trafficking. Since 1999, the United States has been working with Colombia to reduce coca production dramatically in accordance with "Plan Colombia." Bogotá's "Plan Colombia", a multifaceted response to the Colombia's political and military upheaval, has taken as one of its central goals the reassertion of military authority in areas currently controlled by guerrillas.

The United States' response to Colombia's crisis has been an explicit emphasis on support for the military's counter-narcotics operations. The bulk of U.S. military assistance, with billions of dollars allocated to this purpose, will support the Colombian armed forces.

The second-oldest democracy in Latin America, Colombia is a strategically important country that lies adjacent to Venezuela's oil fields, the Panama Canal, and the Caribbean basin.

Venezuela and Colombia do not share just a common 2,219 km border. They are countries joined by similar historical, ethical, cultural and economical identities. However, some discrepancies are present among these neighbor countries. The long-lasting Colombian-Venezuelan relationship is one of the most conflictual in Latin America. "The two countries dispute thirty-four points along

their border, and illegal immigration, transborder guerrilla activity and smuggling heighten Venezuelan concern about Colombia.”<sup>1</sup>

The military assistance provided to “Plan Colombia” is changing the military capabilities of Colombia. This has the potential to alter the balance of power between Colombia and Venezuela.

This thesis examines the relevance of the balance of power in the Western Hemisphere. Using a single case study, this thesis assesses the implications of the implementation of Plan Colombia on the balance of power relations in the Venezuelan-Colombian dyad.

This work attempts to answer two major questions: Is Plan Colombia creating an imbalance of military power in the region? Does it matter? The sub-questions complementing this work are: Is the balance of power theory relevant in Latin America? Is the balance of power theory or “zone of peace/democratic peace” theory better at explaining Colombia-Venezuela relations? What are the expectations after the implementation of Plan Colombia in the region?

## **B. BACKGROUND**

The alternation of war and peace has been one of the main characteristics of human history. Ever since Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian War over 2,400 years ago, scholars from a wide range of disciplines have studied war in the hope of facilitating efforts to prevent its occurrence, reduce its frequency, or mitigate its consequences.<sup>2</sup> Thus, “war has been throughout history a normal way of conducting disputes between political groups.”<sup>3</sup>

South America is not far from this interstate relation of war and peace. However, unlike other areas of the developing world, South America has been one of the most harmonious regions in terms of the absence of international wars. In fact, Latin America represents a theoretical puzzle for the scholars

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<sup>1</sup> David Mares, *Strategic Balance and Confidence Building Measures in Latin America: The Historical Utility of an Ambiguous Concept*, in *Strategic Balance and Confidence Building Measures in the Americas*. The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, D.C., 1998. p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Strassler, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, quoted by Jack Levy, *War and Peace*, “Handbook of International Relations” (2002) p. 350.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Howard, *The Causes of War*, in “Turbulence Peace” (2003) p. 29.

studying International Relations. They are usually attracted to the region because of the characterization of this zone of the Western Hemisphere as a zone with a “long peace”.<sup>4</sup>

Analysts of international conflict tend to ignore South America, believing that little military conflict exists and that whatever wars in which these nations engage are minor.<sup>5</sup> However, almost 200 years after achieving independence from Spain and Portugal, some countries in this particular region are still facing unsolved territorial and boundary disputes. The most serious interstate conflicts involving Central America, South America, or Caribbean countries in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were directly related to territorial or boundary disputes.

One of the best examples is the long-standing Colombian–Venezuelan dyad because during these years, claims on territory led to disputes between the two countries. The Gulf of Venezuela dispute is a good example of a territorial dispute that becomes far more serious when a valuable resource, in this case oil, is involved. The key to establishing control of the disputed territories is ownership of the Los Monjes Islands, a chain of three tiny islands lying at the gulf’s northern mouth. At stake in the dispute is the control over a substantial amount of maritime territory in the Caribbean that extends into the gulf, an area popularly referred to by Colombians as the Coquibacoa Gulf.

By gaining recognition of its claim to the islands, which are said to be all but submerged at high tide, Colombia could expand its national territory into the Caribbean by declaring the extension of its 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone around the islands. It would also be able to claim a portion of the waters of the gulf, located next to Venezuela’s oil-rich Lago de Maracaibo, which, according to estimates of possible reserves, might contain as much as 10 billion barrels of oil.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For more in this concept see Arie Kacowicz (1998), Jorge Dominguez (1998).

<sup>5</sup> David Mares. *Violent Peace: Military Interstate Bargaining in Latin America*. Columbia University Press. New York. (2001) p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> Rafael Schwartz, *Los Monjes: Conflicto entre Venezuela y Colombia*. Bonalde Editores. Caracas. 1993. P-173. Translated by Omar Pina. p. 166.

Several skirmishes concerning territorial discrepancies have occurred throughout the history of these two nations. In August 1987, Colombian warships, including the missile frigate Caldas, entered disputed waters at the mouth of the gulf, Colombian Mirage fighters reportedly conducted over flights of the area and Venezuelan F-16 fighters were moved to a nearby air base which conducted several flights over the Colombian missile frigate. Open hostilities appeared imminent. Even after the withdrawal of the Colombian vessels by order of President Virgilio Barco Vargas, the armed forces of both nations remained on alert in the border area. The Venezuelan government maintained that the vessels' presence in the gulf for three full days represented an act of "intentional provocation" and sent a "strongly worded" formal protest to the Colombian president.<sup>7</sup>

The "Caldas Incident" had military implications for both sides. The military potential of Colombia and Venezuela, compared with other Andean countries, is high. During this skirmish, both countries tested their military capabilities and discovered their weaknesses in the strategic and operational environment. However, what exactly is the size of the military component of these two countries? Has the military size in these two countries changed considerably after the last skirmish?

In their interstate relations, the balance of power has played an essential role because "strategic equilibrium" has been present. This thesis argues that this equilibrium or military balance among a group of states is important to maintain peace.

The introduction of "Plan Colombia" as an alternative to solve the long-running fight against the narcotics trafficking, nowadays called "narco-terrorism", is allocating considerable military assistance to Colombia. This increase in military capabilities is creating an imbalance of power in the region. This is problematic because the balance of power still plays an important role in interstate relations in South America

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<sup>7</sup> Schwartz. p. 175.

### C. SIGNIFICANCE

The essential feature of international politics is that states interact in a state of anarchy. The theory of “Balance of Power,” which results from that anarchy, still plays an important role in international politics today. Although some theorists of democratic peace argue otherwise, the balance of power is still important in inter-American relations. In some cases, as expressed by David Mares, deterrence represents the key to conflict management by directly affecting the cost of using force. Perhaps one good example of conflict management in the region through deterrence is the long lasting Colombian-Venezuelan territorial dispute.

Military force has consistently been used in foreign policies in Latin America.<sup>8</sup> Although Latin American international relations unfold today within a zone of relative peace, and insecurities arising from threats of hostile cross border attacks are not an aspect of most Latin Americans’ concerns, there is a historical preoccupation with strategic balances in the region, including their military components.

Hence, the importance of this project is the study of the impact of the military implementation of Plan Colombia on the military balance of power between Colombia and Venezuela. To what extent is South America really a “zone of peace”? Does balance of power really “matter” in inter-American relations?

This work is also important for U.S policy-makers because it will examine possible responses that the Venezuelan government will make in the near future in order to reestablish their military balance.

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<sup>8</sup> David Mares in *Violent Peace: Military Interstate Bargaining in Latin America* presented a list of 23 wars in which Latin American nations participated after their wars of independence. Of the 23 wars, 17 have been among Latin American nations. According to Mares war also had implications for the regional distribution of power. Mares (2001), p. 35.

#### **D. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In terms of methodology, this research design follows the case study method. This thesis will test the balance of power and zone of peace theories in South America with a single case study. The use of the case study of relations between Colombia and Venezuela will demonstrate that an imbalance of military power exists between these two states after the military implementation of Plan Colombia.

The focus of this thesis will be identifying antecedent conditions to conflictual or peaceful relations in the Colombia and Venezuela dyad and explaining the importance of the balance of power in the security stability for these two countries. Antecedent conditions are territorial disputes, military power and democracy.

#### **E. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

This thesis will be organized in the following manner. Chapter II will provide an introduction to some basic concepts in this particular field of political science. Then, this chapter will present a literature review of the major theoretical debates regarding the research question. It will include theoretical arguments concerning the balance of power in the region. To summarize, the purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with the necessary analytical framework for understanding and appreciating the research question. More specifically, this chapter will review existing arguments regarding the categorization of South America as a “zone of peace” and the importance the balance of power still has in the region. This chapter will also introduce the concept of the spiral model, which indicates possible risks that arise when countries attempt to restore an altered balance of power.

Chapter III will analyze the Colombian-Venezuela dyad. Using the history of the Colombian-Venezuela territorial disputes, this chapter will demonstrate how the balance of power has played an important role in the relations between these two South American countries, with special attention paid to time periods and regime type (Pre-Cold War/ Cold War/Post-Cold War; Democracy-

Democracy/Dictatorship-Democracy), territorial disputes, and military power. Next, the theories on the balance of power will be tested against the case study.

Chapter IV will cover the United States policy in the region. What influence has Plan Colombia as a United States policy had on regional security? How is the United States' response to Colombia's crisis affecting the region with a focus on the Colombia-Venezuela relations? In summary, this chapter will concentrate on the relative impact of the implementation of Plan Colombia on these two countries' military capabilities. It will show how military aid to Colombia is a disservice to regional military stability. What is the likely impact on Venezuela-Colombia relations and Venezuelan defense policy?

Chapter V will summarize the conclusions. If Plan Colombia is creating an imbalance of military power in the region, some reaction is expected from the countries affected. In this case study, Plan Colombia is likely to increase tensions and instability in the long-lasting Colombian-Venezuelan dyad. The military implementation of Plan Colombia destroyed the military equilibrium and no clear perception of the intentions of the neighboring country exists concerning new military capacities. This chapter presents some recommendations for the United States policy makers as well as for the Venezuelan government. The most important step would be for Venezuela and Colombia to make new efforts to finally settle old border disputes over maritime areas.

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## **II. INTERSTATE RELATIONS IN SOUTH AMERICA: BALANCE OF POWER OR ZONE OF PEACE?**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a literature review of the major theoretical debates relevant to the research question. An explanation of the basic concepts (power, anarchy) used in this theoretical framework will be covered in the first part. Second, this chapter will explain the balance of power theory as a basis for this thesis. Next, literature on the characterization of South America as a “zone of peace” or zone of “violence peace” is reviewed. Finally, the possible relevance of the spiral model is discussed. Basically, this chapter will suggest the importance that the balance of power still plays in the region. Hypotheses derived from this literature review will be applied to the case study in subsequent chapters.

### **A. POWER**

It is necessary to define the terms used before discussing the theoretical framework of this thesis.

The concept of power has been the main theme for student of politics, especially for the realist. As presented by Michael Sullivan, power based theories traditionally consist of the realpolitik view that nations operate solely for their own interest, that their interest focuses on the question of the nation’s power, that all nations interact with one another over the question of power, and that power is the ultimate goal of states.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, it is still impossible to define the concept of power with several sentences because it is subjective to the perception or understanding of each person or group or state involved in the relationship.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is more meaningful to sort various kinds of definitions by their characteristics in order to grasp the concept of power.

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Sullivan, “Power in Contemporary Politics”, *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict* (1990), p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> David Baldwin, “Power Analysis and World Politics: New Trends versus Old Tendencies,” *World Politics*, Vol. XXXI, N°2, January 1979, pp. 161-194.

Jeffrey Hart stipulates three main approaches to the observation and measurement of power: the first is control over resources, the second control over actors, and the third control over events and outcomes. The control over the resources approach is the most widely used and accepted approach to the study of national power. The frequent indicators of national power are military expenditures, the size of the armed forces, gross national product, and population.<sup>11</sup>

According to Jeffrey Hart, the control over actors approach is perhaps the most familiar to political scientists. He based his argument on Robert Dahl's definition of power as the ability of A to get B to do something which he would otherwise not do. This, according to Hart "is a control over actors definition, and has not been greatly improved upon since its appearance in 1957."<sup>12</sup>

The power as control over events and outcomes, developed by James Coleman, is based on a rational choice theory of power, in which the reason for controlling resources or other actors arises out of the desire to achieve certain outcomes. These outcomes are social states which are the result of individual or collective action and which are mutually exclusive. According to Jeffrey Hart:

The control over events and outcomes approach emerges as the best approach for measurement of power in contemporary international politics because: 1) is the only approach which takes into account the possibility of interdependence among actors and of collective actions; 2) it is the more general than the other approaches; 3) it produces a type of analysis which has both descriptive and normative advantages over the types of analysis which are associated which are associated with other approaches.<sup>13</sup>

It is important, in order to understand the conceptualization, to make a distinction between power and force.

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<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Hart, *"Three Approaches to the Measurement of Power in International Relations"* International Organization, Vol. 30, No 2 (Spring, 1976). p. 289.

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey Hart (1976), p. 291.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

Political power must be distinguished from force in the sense of the actual exercise of physical violence. The threat of physical violence in the form of police action, imprisonment, capital punishment, or war is an intrinsic element of politics. When violence becomes an actuality, it signifies the abdication of political power in favor of military or pseudo military power. In international politics in particular, armed strength as a threat or a potentiality is the most important material factor making for the political power of a nation.<sup>14</sup>

When physical violence replaces the psychological relation between two minds, it means the substitution of military power for political power. In summary, power can be defined as

the ability of one nation to proactively influence the behavior of other states in its self-interest, using a combination of its resources and capabilities. Thus, in the conceptualization of power, it is the interaction of certain factors that provides a country with the ability to influence others.<sup>15</sup>

Power is a reality and it can be perceived in the simplest aspects of life. However, power is also an abstraction, not a real thing. It exists in every relationship of people but with different postures including the national and international level. Both domestic and international politics “are a struggle for power, modified only by the different conditions under which this struggle takes place in the domestic and in the international spheres.”<sup>16</sup>

The struggle for power “is universal in time and space and is an undeniable fact of experience.”<sup>17</sup> Hence, all states try to obtain some sort of power with the purpose of preventing any nation from becoming strong enough to threaten their independence. This relationship of the distribution of power among states, particularly in some countries in Latin America, is part of the study in this thesis.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Miguel Navarro, “A Chilean Perspective on Strategic Balance” in *Strategic Balance and Confidence Building Measures in the Americas*, (1998) p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

## **B. BALANCE OF POWER**

### **1. Definitions and Characteristics**

The traditional literature on the causes of war has been dominated by the realist paradigm, a system-level approach that incorporates several distinct theories.<sup>18</sup> These theories all posit that the key actors are sovereign states that act rationally to advance their security, power, and wealth in the anarchic system. The main characteristic of this anarchic system is the lack of a legitimate authority to regulate disputes and enforce agreements between states. In other words, anarchy defines the “socio/political framework in which international relations occurs.”<sup>19</sup>

“Anarchy,” rather than denoting chaos or rampant disorder, refers in international politics to the fact that there is no central authority capable of making and enforcing rules of behavior on the international system’s units (states).

According to Levy, this anarchy, along with “uncertainties regarding the present and future intentions of the adversary, induces political leaders to focus on short-term security needs and on their relative position in the system, adopt worst-case thinking, build up their military strength, and utilize coercive threats to advance their interest, influence the adversary, and maintain their reputation.”<sup>20</sup>

In the anarchic international environment, national states/regions are fearful of each other because states have the ability to act in ways that hurt the interest of other states. Security thus becomes the first priority.

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<sup>18</sup> About this fact, Andrew Ross made some arguments in his work “The Theory & Practice of International Relations: Contending Analytical Perspectives”. According to Ross “the central concern of realism is war and peace. Since it is war that most threatens the survival of peoples and states, realists focus on war, particularly major power war, the causes of war, and how it might be prevented. Realist practitioners, consequently, are preoccupied with maintaining national security against external military threats.” In the same subject he quoted Joseph Nye “Realism has been the dominant tradition in thinking about international politics.” See; *Strategy and Force Planning* (1997) p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> Graham Evans, Jeffry Newnham. *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations*. (1998) p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Jack Levy. *Theories of Interstate and Intrastate War*. In Crocker, C., et al. *Turbulent Peace*. Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003. p. 7.

Countries often try to gain security by increasing military expenditures. Since an arms race is a perpetual possibility, one's military superiority will often be equaled or surpassed by others' military build-up efforts. Absolute security is, as a result, impossible. Therefore, all countries are trapped in a "Security Dilemma."<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, how can international outcomes be determined? Jack Levy explains that "the core realist hypothesis is that international outcomes are determined by, or at least are significantly constrained by, the distribution of power between two or more states, though different conceptions of power and of the nature of the system lead to different theories and different predictions about what those specific outcomes are."<sup>22</sup>

There are two structural theories in international politics. One is the hegemonic theory and the other is the balance of power theory. These theories are intended to explain, predict, and describe the characteristics of the international system and, in general, the behavior of states. These theories of international politics have focused on describing great power behavior, because the assumption is that international relations are largely ruled by the great powers of the contemporary system.

Hegemony is a contentious notion in the study of international relations, particularly in the security realm. A hegemon is not just paramount, but is defined by its ability to provide a collective good, in this case, peaceful interstate relations. A regional hegemon is a state that can impose constraints on the use of force by regional states. In the Andean region, only the United States might be able to exercise such hegemony. However, Mares argues that "though the U.S. is uniquely powerful, it is not a hegemon that provides the collective good of peace among nations of the region in which they have their own interest."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and Security Dilemma", *World Politics*, Vol. 2(1950), pp. 157-158

<sup>22</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; and Robert Keohane, ed *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). Quoted by Levy (2003), p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Mares (2001). p. 83.

Hence, the balance of power is more applicable to the Andean region because all the states can hope to compete with each other.

This thesis will focus on the “Balance of Power”, because this “theory posits that the avoidance of hegemony is the primary goal of states and that the maintenance of an equilibrium of power in the system is an essential means to that end.”<sup>24</sup> Also, “hegemonic theories share realist assumptions but de-emphasize the importance of anarchy while emphasizing system management within a hierarchical order.”<sup>25</sup> The Balance of Power theory, which results from international anarchy, will be discussed here as still playing an important role in international relations in the region today.

When discussing the balance of power, the beginning assumptions about states are:

They are unitary actors who at minimum seek their own preservation and, at maximum, drive for universal domination. States, or those who act for them, try in more or less sensible ways to use the means available in order to achieve the ends in view.<sup>26</sup>

Explained simply, the balance of power theory proposes that if an equal distribution of power exists among states then there is an international equilibrium in terms of power, and peace is more likely.

The notion of the balance of power as a general principle had its origins in the philosophers of India, China, and ancient Greece. It later appeared in Machiavelli and Hobbes, guided the actions of great statesmen such as Richilieu, Cromwell, and Bismarck<sup>27</sup>; and was popularized as a theory in the United States thanks to the work of Han Morgenthau.

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<sup>24</sup> Jack Levy. *War and Peace*. Handbook of International Relations. Thousand Oaks, SAGE Publications.(2002). p. 254.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (1979), p. 118.

<sup>27</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Política Entre Las Naciones: La Lucha por el Poder y a Paz*. Grupo Editor Latinoamericano. Buenos Aires. 1986.

Prof. Hans Morgenthau believed that the “Balance of Power” referred to the reality in which power was shared equally by a group of countries.<sup>28</sup> In the eyes of traditional Realists, the most direct and fundamental goal of one’s foreign policy is to acquire power. This is because the only thing that can prevent any single country from being strong enough to threaten others’ independence is the policy of a “Balance of Power”. Prof. Morgenthau also pointed out that a group of countries hoping to maintain or break the *status quo* would finally come to the structure of the “Balance of Power” and adopt the necessary policies to sustain such a structure.<sup>29</sup>

States try to use the means available to them in order to achieve their interests. According to Waltz, these means fall into two categories: internal efforts (moves to increase economic capability, to increase military strength, to develop clever strategies) and external efforts (moves to strengthen and enlarge one’s own alliance or to weaken or shrink an opposite one).<sup>30</sup>

The representative figure of New Realism, Prof. Kenneth Waltz, bases his theory of the balance of power on a critique of the earlier currents of the school of realism, whether traditional or linked to the school of scientism.<sup>31</sup> Waltz once said, “Rational countries living in the state of anarchy and the security dilemma would be suspicious of and hostile to each other because of their tense relations, although that was not their original idea.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, with respect to what constitutes the ultimate interest for a nation, Morgenthau pointed to power, Waltz to security. Waltz also maintains that the “balance of power theory is a theory about the

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<sup>28</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations- The Struggle for Power and Peace* (1973), p.211

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>30</sup> Waltz, (1978), p. 118.

<sup>31</sup> Marcela Donadio and Luis Tibiletti. *Strategic Balance and Regional Security in the Southern Cone*. In *Strategic Balances and Confidence Building Measures in the Americas*. Stanford University Press. 1998. p. 95.

<sup>32</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theories of International Politics*, Mc Graw-Hill. New York. 1992, p. 122.

results produced by the uncoordinated actions of states. The theory makes assumptions about the interest and motives of states, rather than explaining them.”<sup>33</sup>

Thus, as can be seen, the balance of power has a significant number of meanings and interpretations. This thesis only focuses on two: the balance of power as a situation and as a policy. As a situation, the balance of power basically means equilibrium, “it is a purely descriptive term, designed to indicate the character of a situation in which the power relationship between states or groups of states is one of rough or precise equality.”<sup>34</sup> Being that the balance of power is a relation of equality, and sometimes a condition of disequilibrium exists, occasionally it is used or identified as a “policy of promoting the creation or the preservation of equilibrium.”<sup>35</sup> As presented by Claude:

In a multistate system, the only policy which promises to prevent such behavior (stronger power with the temptation to dominate, to oppress, to conquer) is that of confronting power with a countervailing power; stability, survival, protection of national rights and interest demand that power be neutralized by equivalent power. In these terms balance of power is a policy of prudence.

However, power analysts disagree about whether parity or preponderance diminished the likelihood of military conflict. Most of the time, the theoretical literature on the distribution of power and war examines the question from a systemic perspective.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, policymakers in Latin America often focus on the regional or bilateral distribution of power to explain military conflict.

For this reason, if the balance of power theorists are correct, parity should mean both fewer wars and less violent militarization of disputes. The reasoning is simple, Parity brings peace because neither side can be reasonably sure of winning a war at an acceptable cost. According to Mares, the parity theses find

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<sup>33</sup> Donadio and Tibiletti. p. 95.

<sup>34</sup> Inis Claude, *Power and International Relations*, (1967) p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Bremer, Stuart. “*Dangerous Dyads: Conditions Affecting the Likelihood of Interstate War, 1816-1965*”. pp. 313-14. Quoted by David, Mares. *Violent Peace: Military Interstate Bargaining in Latin America*. Columbia University Press. New York. (2001) p. 113.



strong support in the major crises and wars in the last 26 years in Latin America. Out of 14 disputes, only three involve parity and none escalated, Peru-Chile in 1976, Colombia-Venezuela in 1986, and Venezuela-Colombia in 1993.

The power preponderance argument takes a different approach. Rather than see peace resulting from powers of relatively equal military strength balancing each other, preponderance analysts perceive peace to result from one power deterring challengers through its significantly greater power. In Mare's study, *Violent Peace: Military Interstate Bargaining in Latin America*, the preponderance argument is rejected for the last 26 years because all three wars in the period involved preponderance, and it was the weaker state that engaged in provocative behavior. Hence, the balance of power is a better fit with the realities in Latin America, and will be used as a source of hypotheses regarding the Colombian-Venezuelan dyad.

The concept of the balance of power can be a useful tool in explaining the behavior of states. This is because it is founded on the assumption that all states act to preserve their own self interest. Thus, the international stage features many independent actors each seeking their own best interests and security. This idea is valid for all states, from north to south and from the first to third world countries. They all seek to maintain their own interests. The following areas in this chapter will cover some theories regarding the issue of the balance of power in Latin America and the characterization of Latin America as a zone of peace.

### **C. LATIN AMERICA AS A ZONE OF PEACE**

Are democracies more peaceful in their foreign relations? If so, what are the theoretical explanations of this phenomenon? Immanuel Kant posited that a republican form of government, exemplifying the rule of law, provides a feasible basis for states to overcome structural anarchy and to secure peaceful relations among themselves.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, translated by Lewis White Beck. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957, in Steve Chan "In Search of Democratic Peace: Problems and Promise", *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol. 41 N°1 (May 1997)

“Democratic peace theory explicitly holds that it is the very nature of democratic political system that accounts for the fact that democracies do not fight or threaten other democracies.”<sup>38</sup> The theory advances two alternative explanations. The first is institutional constraints and the second is democratic norms and cultures. Institutional constraints explain that democratic governments are reluctant to go to war because they must answer to their citizens.<sup>39</sup> Citizens pay the price for war in blood and treasure. If the price of conflict is high, democratic governments may fall victim to electoral retribution. The democratic norm explanation holds that “the culture, perceptions, and practices that permit compromise and the peaceful resolution of conflicts without threat of violence within countries come to apply across national boundaries toward other democratic countries.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, democratic states develop positive perceptions of other democracies.

In sum, political liberalism has long argued that different kinds of states are likely to behave in different ways and that democratic or republican states are likely to be more peaceful.

However, domestically insecure liberalizing states in unstable neighborhoods pose potential problems for regional security. During the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, five Latin America boundary disputes between neighboring states have resulted in the use of force.<sup>41</sup> One good example is Ecuador and Peru when they went to war in 1995, resulting in more than 1,000 casualties with negative results for both economies.

In this dilemma between war and peace, the distribution of power has played an important role in Latin American. According to Mares,

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<sup>38</sup> Christopher Layne, *Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace*, International Security, Vol. 19, N°2 (Autumn, 1994) p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Doyle. “*Kant. Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs*”, pp. 205-235 quoted by Christopher Layne, *Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace*, International Security, Vol. 19, N°2 (Autumn, 1994) p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> For more details on this subject, see Mares 1997.

military force has consistently been used in the foreign policies of Latin American countries. The twentieth century has seen more than two hundred instances in which Latin American states either threatened or used military force or were the subject of such threats or force by non- Latin American countries.<sup>42</sup>

That Being the case, the question is to what extent is South America really a “zone of peace?” Does the balance of power really “matter” in inter-American relations?

The struggle for most scholars involved in this area of study is to solve unusual characteristics in this part of the Western Hemisphere. Among some of the questions in the puzzle are: Why do territorial, boundary, and other disputes endure? Why is interstate conflict over boundaries relatively frequent? Why is interstate war infrequent? In fact, what appears to be very interesting for most scholars is that by international standards, Latin America was relatively free from interstate war during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Dr. Arie Kacowicz in his book, “Zones of Peace in the International System”, tried to explain the preservation of peace in different regions of the world characterized by the absence of international wars for extended periods of time. He intended to explain the phenomenon of zones of peace (negative peace) in the Third World comparing South America with West Africa.<sup>43</sup>

Kacowicz defined the “zone of peace” as a discrete geographical region of the world in which a group of states have maintained peaceful relations among themselves for a period of at least 30 years, although civil wars and domestic unrest and violence might still occur within their borders, as well as international conflicts and crisis among them.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> David Mares, *Regional Conflict Management in Latin America: Power complemented by Diplomacy*, (1997) p. 197.

<sup>43</sup> Arie Kacowicz, *Zones of Peace in the Third World, South America and West Africa in Comparative Perspective*, (1998) p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Arie Kacowicz “*Explaining Zones of Peace: Democracies as satisfied Powers?*” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 32, N° 3, 1995. p. 266.

Kacowicz also mentioned that “zones of peace in the international system develop when states are conservatives in their territorial claims; in other words, when they are satisfied with the status quo within their borders and across them.”<sup>45</sup>

Particularly in the South American region, Kacowicz explained that the absence of international wars and relative isolation from the Cold War confrontation has led this region to recognize and promote a zone of peace, meaning a comprehensive concept of stable peace, disarmament and a democratic perspective on regional security. In summary, his focus in explaining the concept of zone of peace in this region can be categorized with the following:

...with the absence of international wars, assessing why in South America there has been an inclination to deal with international disputes rather than to fight over them, and examining how this one-hundred-years zone of peace was upgraded from the mere absence of war (negative peace) to stable peace and the impossibility of war...and finally inched in the direction of a pluralistic security community in the 1990s.<sup>46</sup>

Considering this argument, Kacowicz presented Latin America as a zone of peace. He stated that “the vast majority of border disputes in South America have been resolved peacefully, leading to some cession or exchange of territories.” Moreover, he expressed that “most of the South American conflicts have been satisfied with their territorial status quo, with the exception of Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Argentina.”<sup>47</sup>

According to Kacowicz’s theoretical framework, the different explanations for the maintenance of South American peace can be grouped into three different descriptions. The first are the realist and geopolitical explanations such as the pacifying roles of the United States and Brazil or a regional balance of power, the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

second are liberal explanations such as the effects of democratization, and the third is the satisfaction with the territorial status quo, derived from both domestic and international sources.<sup>48</sup>

The realist and geopolitical explanation can be understood in part as the application of the hegemonic stability theory,<sup>49</sup> but it also views this peace as a function of a balance of power system involving a complex and interrelated set of alliances and antagonism. In other words, Kacowicz see this region as practicing a comprehensive regional balance of power.

In his work, *Explaining Zones of Peace: Democracies as Satisfied Powers*, Kacowicz presented some arguments explaining why democracies do not fight each other. He made an attempt to establish a correlation between democracies and territorial demands by posing the hypothesis that well established democracies do not fight each other since they are conservative powers, usually satisfied with the territorial status quo within and across their borders. This is what constitutes a liberal explanation.

Finally, Kacowicz stated that “satisfaction with the status quo has been a crucial factor though not the sole one, in the maintenance of peace in South America.”<sup>50</sup> In support of this conclusion, he noted:

Irrespective of the changing nature of their political regimes throughout the twentieth century, the rise and decline of balance of power configurations and geopolitical doctrines, and the progression from independence towards interdependence most of the South American countries have been satisfied with the territorial status quo, following their national consolidation in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twenties.

I will argue that some of these elements in Kacowicz’s explanations are not the exclusive causal mechanisms for considering Latin America as a zone of

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>49</sup> The familiar argument, as summarized by Keohane, is that “hegemonic structures of power, dominated by a single country, are most conducive to the development of strong international regimes, whose rules are relatively precise and well obeyed”. Robert Keohane, (1980) p. 132.

<sup>50</sup> Kacowicz (1998) p. 105.

peace. However, one part of his realist explanation is used to support the author's argument that the balance of power is important to the region. Moreover, a case study explains how the influence of one of the region's hegemons is creating an imbalance of military power in some countries in South America.

Some scholars question the causal inference that democracies are at peace with each other simply because they are democratic. One of the hypotheses to explain the phenomenon is *political stability makes peace*. According to Russett,

States with stable and durable political systems will lack incentives to externalize domestic discontent into conflict with foreign countries. They will be more reluctant to engage in conflict against other states that are politically stable.<sup>51</sup>

This hypothesis is appropriate to explain some cases of inter-state disputes in Latin America, because some had experienced political instability. For Russett, unstable governments have more to gain from diversion and they do so when confronting an adversary that faces substantial domestic political problems. To some extent, this relationship applies to the case study presented in this work and introduced in Chapter IV.

The ideas categorizing South America as a zone of peace relate more to international wars and the practical isolation from the direct confrontation of the Cold War. However, this so-called stable peace had other types of conflicts that in one way or another are important for inter-state relations of most countries in the region. The next section introduces a different approach to this categorization as well as presenting this zone of the Western Hemisphere as a zone of violent peace.

#### **D. LATIN AMERICA ZONE AS A ZONE OF VIOLENT PEACE**

History shows that the danger of conflict in Latin America is always present. Although the risks are not high, they have generated recurring cycles of tensions between states in the various sub-regions.

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<sup>51</sup> Bruce, Russett. *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for Post Cold World*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993. p. 29.

According to David Mares, the use of violence across national boundaries has been a consistent trait of Latin America's international politics. Violence in the region, he stated, escalates to war in much the same proportion as in the rest of the world, with the exception of the Middle East.<sup>52</sup>

According to Mares,

from 1980-97 there were at least 52 Militarized Interstate Disputes (MID). Of these MIDs 15 occurred among interstate dyads combining democratic and nondemocratic regimes, 27 MIDs were between democratic pairs and only 10 MIDs occurred among nondemocratic dyads.<sup>53</sup>

Border demarcations dominate the list of current grievances in the region. Without overcoming the problems of defining territories, the region will continue to be a zone of danger and distrust.

Thinking of international politics as a bargaining situation, Mares regards the decision to use military violence as a bargaining tactic rather than a decision to settle interstate disputes through war. The combination of political-military strategy chosen determines the costs of conflict, the strategic balance among the parties involved, and the characteristics of the force to be used.

The hypothesis of Mares's militarized bargaining model is that force may be used if those costs are equal to or lower than the costs acceptable to the leader's constituency minus the degree by which policymakers are accountable to their constituencies. Force will not always be used when these conditions are met, but it will certainly not be used in their absence. Once militarized, the decision to escalate further follows the same logic.

Mares demonstrates, with a variety of quantitative and qualitative analyses, that the three major paradigms purporting to explain the use of military force fail to challenge empirical evaluation (democratic peace paradigm, hegemonic management theory and distribution of power theories). He stated

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<sup>52</sup> David Mares. *Violent Peace: Military Interstate Bargaining in Latin America*. Columbia University Press. New York. (2001) p. 28.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

that the distribution of power theories also fail to explain the use of force adequately. Although the author shows that neither parity nor preponderance correlates strongly with the decision to use force in Latin America's disputes, the "parity thesis finds a strong support in the case of major crisis and wars in the last 26 years"<sup>54</sup> This means that none of the three wars in this period of time occurred in a context of military parity. In reality, it was the weaker power that was more likely to initiate militarized disputes in the region.

Consequently, without resolving the question of borders, the general climate of relations in some Latin American countries will not change. Therefore, some zones or regions in Latin America should not be considered Zones of Peace. Unsolved border disputes still occur in Latin America. Thus, countries with territorial disputes become countries with security concerns. The prevalence of disputed territorial borders in the region means that the method of resolution of a particular conflict, whether diplomatic or military, takes on more general significance. For those countries, the balance of power is the tool used to maintain their own interest and security.

The basic argument that governments pay attention to some notion of military balance applies to Latin American countries currently.<sup>55</sup> This thesis uses as a case study one of the longest existing dyads in the Western Hemisphere. The long-standing Colombia- Venezuela relationship is one of the most conflictual in contemporary Latin America. Thus, the question is to what extent the balance of power has played an important role in this dyad? What role has liberal democracy played in these two countries? Does the balance of power really matter in the region?

#### **E. SPIRAL THEORY**

One of the most controversial issues in International Relations is the role of perceptions of the other state's intentions. In this regard, one of the first theoretical perspectives that must be considered is the spiral model. The basic

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<sup>54</sup> Mares (2001). p. 119.

<sup>55</sup> David Mares. *The Historical Utility of an Ambiguous Concept*. In *Strategic Balances and Confidence Building Measures in the Americas*. Stanford University Press. 1998. p. 155.



premise of the spiral theory is that a state's efforts to increase its security can sometimes backfire and produce insecurity or conflict instead.<sup>56</sup>

This set of assumptions may give rise to a security dilemma in the sense that, if each negotiator seeks expansion of his or her own coercive capabilities to deter opposing negotiators, each will find in the opponent's behavior an ultimate reason to expand further.

Besides gathering coercive power, the security dilemma may give rise to coercive action as well. For example, Jervis observed that "the drive for security will also produce aggressive actions if the state either requires a very high sense of security or feels menaced by the very presence of other states."<sup>57</sup>

These interactions are affected by the perceptions of the other side. The central message Robert Jervis argues is that perception is profoundly theory driven, that decisionmakers tend to see what they expect to see, and that these expectations are often driven by stereotyped lessons of history, analogies, or routine scripts that provide shortcuts for making assessments under uncertainty. The impact of external reality on decisions is mediated by an actors' perceptions and misperceptions.

In sum,

the spiral model holds that statesmen see hostility as indicating that the other is out to get them and believe that the best, if not the only way to cope with this threat is with negative sanctions. Decision-makers sometimes believe that the other is acting out of insecurity or that real incompatibility, although significant, is limited. Even if they see the other as extremely hostile, decision-makers usually weight, however roughly and inadequately, the cost of responding with hostility, the gains of conciliation, and the possibility of compromise.<sup>58</sup>

This theory is relevant to this case study because the response to an imbalance of power could fall into a state's efforts to increase its security and this

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<sup>56</sup> Robert Jervis. *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton University Press. (1976).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

could result in conflict. This is important because the “foreign policy behavior of states can be affected by the psychological process involved in individual judgment and decision making”<sup>59</sup>. In this case study, the perceptions Colombia and Venezuela have of each other are driven by lessons of recent history on the use of force on border disputes. For this reason, the misperceptions of the **capabilities** and **intentions** of the adversary could provide the dynamics that might trigger a war.

## F. CONCLUSION

This chapter explained the basic theoretical framework of this thesis. The previous sections of this chapter raised the basic structure of the realist paradigm: international politics is an anarchic, self-help realm.

In this anarchic international environment, states are fearful of each other because any state is free to use force if it chooses. Security, thus, becomes the first priority. “This is because a state can never be certain that others’ intentions are benign; consequently its policies must be shaped in response to other’s capabilities.”<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, states will try to preserve a balance of military capabilities, but the effort to restore a balance that was upset might produce a war.

On the other hand, this chapter introduced the democratic peace theory as a causal variable to explain the maintenance of peace. Particularly in South America, Arie Kacowicz argues there is an absence of international wars, and says the effects of democratization and satisfaction with the status quo are the different explanations for the maintenance of peace in this region of the Western Hemisphere.

Based on these theories, it is possible to infer some predictions for the case study.

First, from the democratic peace theory point of view, the changes within the states (democracy) can transform the nature of international politics. In other

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<sup>59</sup> Levy (2003). p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> Christopher Layne, *Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace*, International Security, Vol. 19, N°2 (Autumn, 1994) p. 11.

words, the democratic peace theory holds that it is the very nature of democratic political system that accounts for the fact that democracies do not fight or threaten other democracies. Therefore, if the military implementation of Plan Colombia is creating an imbalance of power between Colombia and Venezuela, the affected country most probably will not make any kind of response due to the nature of the political regime. Put simply, Venezuela will ignore this imbalance in strategic military capabilities.

The second is a realist perspective. "Realist takes the view that even if states change internally, the structure of the international political system remains the same."<sup>61</sup> Then, if there is an imbalance of power, the weaker state feels threatened and it will take actions to restore the balance. Consequently, if Colombia is gaining an advantage over Venezuela, the latter will react to an imbalance of power by trying to restore the balance. Hence, Venezuela's response could fall into an internal effort (increase military capabilities) to reestablishing equilibrium. Internal efforts will be used because Venezuela has no external allies available.

Moreover, these changing power balances and escalating military buildups will increase the security dilemma and could trigger a spiral model scenario that makes war more possible. As Robert Jervis explained, "when states seek the ability to defend themselves, they get too much and too little...unless the requirements for offense differ in kind and amount, a status quo power will desire a military posture that resembles that of an aggressor."<sup>62</sup> Therefore, before it is possible to restore a balance of power, Colombia and Venezuela could undergo a dangerous period of instability.

In order to understand the relation of these theories with the case study, the following chapter will study the background of the Colombian-Venezuelan dyad and how the balance of power has played a special role in their relations.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Jervis. *"Perception and Misperception in International Politics"*. Princeton. Princeton University Press. (1976). p. 64.

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### III. COLOMBIAN-VENEZUELAN DYAD

#### A. HISTORICAL REVIEW OF COLOMBIAN AND VENEZUELAN DISPUTES

Most of the litigations in Latin America have originated from historical causes, since most were inherited from the colonial period. "The initial division of the Spanish territory in Latin America and the lack of defined borders, as well as reiterated attempts undertaken in a climate of political instability during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, to expand one's the own territory at the expense of the neighbor,"<sup>63</sup> gave rise to many of the present territorial disputes. Venezuelan and Colombian relations are not excluded from these origins. The following paragraphs present a historical review of the relations between Colombia and Venezuela regarding border claims.

The disparities in borders between Venezuela and Colombia have contributed to a fluctuating undercurrent of tension over the years. Three independent republics were created from the break-up of the Great Colombia in 1830: Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela. "A long process of border disputes between Colombia and Venezuela began from this event that have continued for more than two and a half centuries, and that has prevented the possibilities of improved relations."<sup>64</sup>

The Venezuelan-Colombian borders were not clearly defined after the Independence Wars. Consequently, the disputes between these two nations became unavoidable. Colombia has always represented a military concern for Venezuela. The two countries dispute 34 points along their border, with the most serious being the Gulf of Venezuela. The roots of the boundary maritime issue stretch back to colonial times.

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<sup>63</sup> Rodríguez, F. *"Procesos Limítrofes de América Latina"*. Santiago de Chile: Riposta, (1998). p. 37. Translated by Omar Pina.

<sup>64</sup> Soto, J. *"El Incidente del Caldas Manejo de una Crisis Política"*, Unpublished Thesis. Universidad Simón Bolívar, (1995). p. 1. Translated by Omar Pina.

## 1. Principal Interstate Disputes between Colombia and Venezuela

Four major incidents occurred between Colombia and Venezuela during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At least one of the parties used some form of deterrence or military force based on these incidents. In 1881, both countries requested Spain's King Alfonso XII's arbitration over the conflicting claims. In 1891, Venezuela rejected the eventual 1891 arbitration decision because it disagreed on the location of Río de Oro's source (Gold River). Fifty years later, both nations signed a treaty establishing the border along the Guajira Peninsula.

**a. *Rio de Oro Incident, 1928***

In 1916, both countries agreed to request a second arbitration due to disagreements resulting from Spanish decision in 1891. By 1928, when discussions about the boundaries of Rio de Oro in both countries emerged during Venezuelan President Gomez' regime, Colombia presented disputes that were intended to force Venezuela into signing the 1916 convention's anticipated treaty. Additionally, Colombia wanted unrestricted access to navigate the Orinoco River. At the time, General Gomez responded with a military mobilization known as the "1928 Maracay Military Parade."<sup>65</sup>

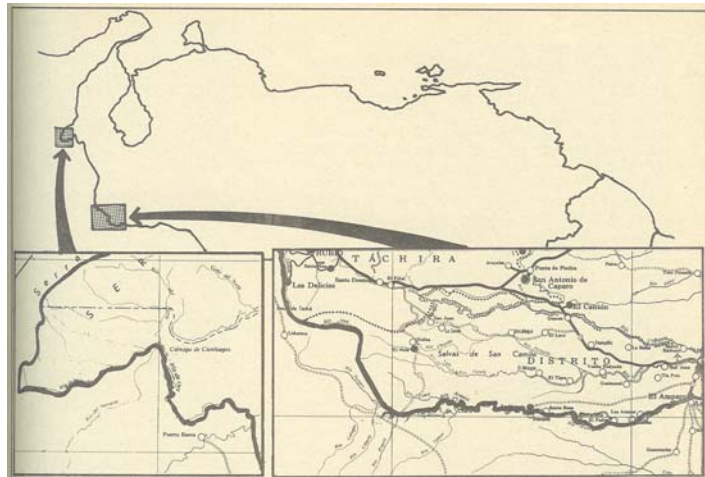


Figure 1. Area of Rio de Oro Limit Discussion (1928)

<sup>65</sup> Área, L. (1991) *El golfo de Venezuela. Documentación y Cronología*. U.C.V. Caracas: Publicidad Gráfica León, p. 152.

During this period, Colombia was a democracy under President Miguel Abadía Méndez and experienced severe economic problems. On the other hand, Venezuela was under Venezuela's longest dictatorship of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (27 years). In addition to being a dictatorship, General Juan Vicente Gomez paid all Venezuelan foreign debt and created a formal Armed Forces. In this incident, neither parity nor preponderance was significant due to the small military capabilities of both armies at that time. The factor that might be useful to consider is the disparity in regime type.

**b. Arauca Treaty Incident, 1941**

In 1941, Colombia located troops on the common border with Venezuela to press for an advantageous adjustment with respect to their claims. The pressure reached such proportions that Venezuelan President, Commander-in-Chief Lopez Contreras, recognized that he acquiesced in the signing of this Treaty of 1941<sup>66</sup> because Venezuela "...was not prepared militarily to deal with a Colombian invasion."<sup>67</sup> Many Venezuelans, however, have criticized this 1941 treaty for granting too much territory to Colombia. This attitude has hardened the stance of the armed forces with regard to the Gulf of Venezuela. It has also rendered more tentative the attempts of subsequent governments to negotiate the boundary in the gulf. Moreover, the development of oil resources in the area and the expectation of further expansion also raised the stakes involved in a potential resolution.

Colombia in 1941 was a democratic regime led by President Eduardo Santos. He was experienced in the international arena due to his work in finding a solution to Peru's hostilities in the Leticia War. As a result of the military confrontation in the Leticia War, Colombia had better military capabilities. On the other hand, Venezuela had just recovered from 27 years of dictatorship

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<sup>66</sup> Treaty on Demarcation of Borders and Navigation of the common rivers of Venezuela and Colombia, subscribed in Cúcuta, Colombia on April 5, 1941 between Presidents Eduardo Santos and Eleazar Lopez Contreras.

<sup>67</sup> Angelli, M. "*Agravios de Colombia a Venezuela*." Caracas: Italgráfica.(1993). Translated by Omar Pina.

and had a president not elected by the people but appointed by the congress. Therefore, a pseudo-democracy describes Venezuela's regime type.

Consequently, this case has one democracy and a pseudo-democracy where one had better military capabilities and used it to fulfill their aspirations. As expressed by Schwartz, Colombia adopted this attitude because they considered themselves strongest in military capabilities since they repelled a Peruvian invasion in 1932.<sup>68</sup>

**c. Admiral Padilla Incident, 1952**

In the 1950's, new confrontations occurred. On January 23, 1952, the Colombian Department of State started a new claim where they stated that the Islands of Los Monjes (The Monks) in the Gulf of Venezuela belonged to Colombia. On February 26, the Venezuelan government declared sovereignty over the Los Monjes Islands by erecting a navigation light, and notified all navigators.<sup>69</sup>

On September 1, 1952, the Colombian Navy Corvette 'Admiral Padilla' cast anchor, for two hours, in front of the northern island of Los Monjes and fired artillery rounds. According to Soto, this incident escalated to such a point that Venezuela's Chiefs of Staff intensely discussed whether to authorize a Venezuelan Air Force fighter to fly over the area and sink the 'Admiral Padilla'.<sup>70</sup> According to Schwartz,

at that time Venezuela was in a better military capacity than Colombia. Taking this into consideration, Venezuela accepted the challenge, and sent to the area troops in military ships, all of them being in combat readiness, plus airplanes with instructions to sink the ship, if it did not leave the Venezuelan waters in a specific time.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Schwartz, R. "*Los Monjes: Conflicto entre Venezuela y Colombia*." Bonalde Editores. (1993). p. 134. Translated by Omar Pina.

<sup>69</sup> Olavaria, J. (1987). p. 56.

<sup>70</sup> Soto, J. "*El Incidente del Caldas Manejo de una Crisis Política*." Unpublished Thesis. Caracas: Universidad Simón Bolívar (1995), p. 59.

<sup>71</sup> Schwartz, R. "*Los Monjes: Conflicto entre Venezuela y Colombia*." Bonalde Editores. (1993). p. 135. Translated by Omar Pina.



This military posturing proved a sufficient deterrent, which resulted in the 'Admiral Padilla' leaving the area and conflict being avoided.

On November 22, 1952 the Colombian Department of State by means of communication GM-542 exposed the Colombian government's conclusions concerning the Archipelago of Los Monjes. Part of this communication stated that the Colombian government does not force any claims to sovereignty over any part of Venezuela or the archipelago in reference.<sup>72</sup> This resolved the crisis without Venezuela having to make concessions.

Colombia during this period of time was under immense internal pressure. The President in 1952 was Roberto Urdaneta who gained power due to a medical absence of President Laureano Gomez. Violence, guerrillas, and political instability were the major characteristics of this temporary regime that was becoming a dictatorship in Colombia. Venezuela experienced the last dictatorship of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In terms of military capacity, the military junta in Caracas had increased the Venezuelan Armed Forces capabilities with the purchase of jet fighters and different types of tanks.

In this particular incident, Venezuela had better military capabilities. However, it was the weaker state that engaged in provocative behavior. This correlates with Mares finding that "ten of the fourteen major crises (in Latin America) were initiated by weaker power refusing to back down in confrontations with preponderant rivals."<sup>73</sup> The regime type is an important factor to consider because the democratic status of Colombia is present but not under the formal president. However, it can be said that the Democracy-Dictatorship dyad is a possible argument to explain the militarized interstate dispute in this case because military governments are often seen as quick to utilize military force to resolve conflicts. Moreover, military regimes are believed to be authoritarian, not

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<sup>72</sup> CORPOANDES. "*Antecedentes de las Relaciones Fronterizas Venezolano-Colombiano.*" Caracas: Editorial del Lago 2do Tomo.(1982). p. 4. Translated by Omar Pina.

<sup>73</sup> Mares (2001). p. 119. Parenthesis by author.

only because the application of force is their profession but also, the existence of a controlling government means that force has been utilized against opponents at home.

Others were provoked because of this incident. After an abortive effort in the early 1970's and an inflexible refusal by Venezuela to submit the dispute to international arbitration, the two governments announced a draft treaty designated the Hypothesis of Caraballeda in 1981. The negotiators convened six formal sessions in the course of a year, the first in Medellín, Colombia in October 1979 to the last in Caraballeda, Venezuela in October 1980, beginning a period of consultation.

However, when President Luis Herrera Campins' foreign minister presented the draft to representatives of the Officer Corps of the Venezuelan military, he received an extremely negative reaction. Some saw this proposal as giving Colombia some rights over a small portion of the Gulf of Venezuela, to allow the joint exploitation of border marine oil deposits.

The details of these negotiations became public and were given prominent attention by the media. The Venezuelan public rejected the proposal positions as not being consistent with maintaining national pride. The proposal was brought to a national referendum, and opposition was so clamorous that the administration finally had to yield. In the process, many of the opposing voices raised the point that the previous treaties with Colombia were not valid, and the Foreign Ministry was accused of being antipatriotic.

Regarding this event, a perception of attempted coercion by the Colombian Government to conclude negotiations arose when part of their military components made some movements along the borders with Venezuela. As commented by Area "...[I]n events well-known to all of us, in the heat of the discussion for the agreement on the hypothesis of limitation of marine and

submarine waters, Colombia made military movements as a form of pressure that immediately were responded to on the part of Venezuelan Armed Forces.”<sup>74</sup>

One important aspect to be considered in this particular event is that both countries were well established democracies. The democratic experience of Venezuela and Colombia in this regard started earlier if compared with the rest of the countries in Latin America. Hence, the use of any type of coercion in this case is contrary to the norm as democracies tend to be more pacific or avoid the use of force.

With the failure of Caraballeda, a period of boundary negotiations closed between both countries. In June 1985, Venezuelan President Jaime Lusinchi and Colombian President Belisario Betancourt re-opened negotiations in the declaration of Arauca. Here "... the intention that motivates both governments is to persevere in the efforts to solve, by means of right and equitable solutions, the relative subjects to the boundary of Marine and Submarine Areas.”<sup>75</sup>

Between 1985 and 1987, an intense interchange of diplomatic notes took place between both countries. At the same time, public opinion in both countries maintained the intensity of diplomatic exchanges. This information vortex precipitated a progressive rise in the tone of diplomatic relations and public opinion "...[T]he Venezuelan Department of State observed with concern the unusual number of protest notes received from Colombia; twelve in that period...this with the evident intention to create a file that allowed Colombia to prove that the Venezuelan National Guard committed outrages against Colombian nationals.”<sup>76</sup>

#### **d. Caldas Incident, 1987**

Perhaps the highest level incident between the two nations happened in 1987 when the Colombian Armed Forces placed the Corvette Caldas in Venezuelan waters. This was not a navigation error. The Colombians

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<sup>74</sup> Área, L. *“El golfo de Venezuela. Documentación y Cronología”*. Universidad Central de Venezuela (U.C.V). Caracas. Publicidad Gráfica León, (1991) p. 152.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>76</sup> Soto, J. (1995). p. 135.

realized where the ship was and were trying to provoke Venezuela, so that the Colombian Government could execute political actions in different international circumstances. According to Olavarria, “the dangerous and irresponsible maneuver of provocation was destined to urge the spontaneous mediation and good faith of third states thus putting in evidence that the bilateral routes for the solution of the problem are in fact exhausted.”<sup>77</sup>



Figure 2. Area of Gulf of Venezuela

The positioning of the Caldas Corvette and the diplomatic interchange between both countries precipitated the concentration, mobilization and deployments of Venezuelan military units, to the degree considered optimal to conduct battle operations if necessary as of August 18. In this interval, Venezuela organized the Command of Theater of Operations and deployed tanks, airplanes and frigates all along the wide western border. Accordingly, part of the Infantry and the Artillery were mobilized. According to Soto, "there was a

<sup>77</sup> Olavarria, J. (1987). p.154.

great coherence between the strategy that arose from the initial perception and the political conduct of the crisis.”<sup>78</sup>

On August 17, 1987, following the suggestion formulated by the Secretary General of the American Organization of States, Joao Baena Spares, and the President of Argentina, Raul Ricardo Alfonsin, the President of Colombia ordered the retirement of the Colombian ship for the sake of the de-escalation of the conflict between the two countries. “...Colombia, faithful to the principles of controversy resolution and consequent with its tradition of Latin American will, has ordered the pertinent measures to contribute to the normalization of the situation and trusts that the Government of Venezuela will do the same thing.”<sup>79</sup>

Particularly important for this analysis is that during this event, both countries were under a democratic regime. Although both countries had similar military capabilities, Venezuela maintained a better equipped Air Force. Nevertheless, it was the weaker state that initiated the use of military force in this incident. Chapter IV will analyze the ‘Caldas’ incident in more detail.

It is also necessary to evaluate the attacks to Venezuelan territory in the 1990’s. In this decade, eight attacks on Venezuelan border positions coming from Colombian insurgents occurred<sup>80</sup>, with lamentable losses of Venezuelan military personnel, from the Army as well as the National Guard.<sup>81</sup> For the Venezuelan State, this was seen as the repercussions due to the loss of Colombian central government authority in some areas of this domestic conflict.

This situation stayed and reached its higher point in the 1990’s with the attack on the Venezuelan Marines’ post ‘Manuel Echeverrias’ on the border with Colombia, in Cararabo, Apure State. There, twelve Venezuelan soldiers

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<sup>78</sup> Soto, J. (1995). p. 172.

<sup>79</sup> Bendeck, J. (1994). *Situación Regional de los Países Suramericanos*. Buenos Aires: Plaemar. Translated by Omar Pina.

<sup>80</sup> An extensive list of incursion to Venezuelan territory from Colombia’s principal insurgents groups: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), can be found at [http://www.ict.org.il/inter\\_ter/orgattack.cfm?orgid=26](http://www.ict.org.il/inter_ter/orgattack.cfm?orgid=26) [10 June 2004]

<sup>81</sup> Arellano, J. (2003). “*El Conflicto Interno de Colombia: entre la Gobernabilidad y el Colapso*.” At <http://www.puc.cl/icp/webcp/Papers/def6.pdf>. (30 March 2004)

were killed in combat, which is remembered for the "viciousness and cold blood with which the insurgents massacred the Venezuelan marines."<sup>82</sup>

In view of the insecurity along the Colombian-Venezuelan border, and due to Colombian irregular groups incursions, President Rafael Caldera activated Theater of Operations No 1 (T.O. No 1) in 1995 and Theater of Operations No 2 (T.O. No 2) in 1997; deactivating Task Group 1.1. The principal difference between them is the extension of the Area of Responsibilities (AOR) and the characterization of this new area of the border as a zone of conflict. Primarily, the mission of the Theater of Operations is "to carry out and conduct military and other operations in order to guarantee territorial integrity, sovereignty and national independence, combat and eradicate banditry, terrorism, drug dealing and smuggling, being also prepared to accomplish missions of conventional warfare in their areas of responsibilities."<sup>83</sup>

At the end of the 1990's, a conflicting situation appears in relation to both countries. The elected president of Colombia, Andrés Pastrana Arango, presented a vision from the new government, concerning attempts at reconciliation within Colombia, with the *aid of two programs* that included a set of actions directed to restrain the causes of violence in Colombia, and to obtain the international endorsement necessary to advance a process of reconciliation with the rebel groups on 8 July 1998 for public opinion.<sup>84</sup>

One of these programs is Plan Colombia. This program is generating new problem scenarios for Colombia's neighboring countries. The Venezuelan case is one. As expressed by James Petras,

Plan Colombia, a typical low intensity war (where large-scale U.S. financing and arms and low level ground troop commitment are combined), has already had a high intensity impact (on peasants and workers) which is internationalizing the conflict. Dozens of

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<sup>82</sup> Cardona, R. (1997). "*Puestos Fronterizos están en Estado de Alerta*". At <http://www.el-universal.com/1997/02/28/28115B.shtml> (1 April 2004)

<sup>83</sup> Alfredo, Puyana. *Plan Colombia, Consequences for Venezuelan National Security*. U.S. Army War College. 2002. p. 18

<sup>84</sup> Proceso de Paz en Colombia at <http://www.ub.es/solidaritat/observatori/esp/colombia/documentos/proceso.htm> (02 March 2004).

suspected peasants, community activists, schoolteachers, and others have been assassinated, in order to terrorize the rest of the population. As Plan Colombia escalates the violence, thousands of peasants are fleeing across the borders into Venezuela, Ecuador, Panama, and Brazil. Inevitably cross border attacks by the paramilitaries on refugees has widened the military conflict. The frontier and borders have become war zones in which squatter refugees living in squalor are partisans in the conflict and are targets of the Colombian military. Rather than containing the civil conflict, Plan Colombia is extending and internationalizing the war, exacerbating instability in the adjoining regions of neighboring countries.<sup>85</sup>

Besides the problem of a large number of Colombian refugees, the other problem is the military aspect. With the implementation of Plan Colombia in the border area, there is a great possibility of increased armed clashes with the Colombian insurgents and paramilitaries. As a matter of fact, this type of incident has already occurred when a series of coordinated land and air attacks by Venezuelan forces on Colombia territory were held in late December 2003 in hot pursuit of right-wing paramilitaries.<sup>86</sup>

The initial “peace process” attempted during the last decade under the presidency of Andres Pastrana ended unsuccessfully, and explains why the Colombians elected Alvaro Uribe as Pastrana’s successor. The strategy of President Uribe, habitually referred to as a hardliner, is largely military. According to Mark Falcoff, “he regards the guerrilla problem as a police and security question and has proceeded accordingly.”<sup>87</sup>

However, regionally, President Uribe has the perception that currently the Venezuelan government is not an ally in the war against insurgent groups. Relations between Caracas and Bogotá have been strained by Colombian suspicions that President Chávez’s regime provides safe haven and

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<sup>85</sup> James Petras. *The Geo-Politics of Plan Colombia*. At [http://www.rebellion.org/petras/english/Petras\\_on\\_Plan\\_Colombia.pdf](http://www.rebellion.org/petras/english/Petras_on_Plan_Colombia.pdf). (10 April 2004).

<sup>86</sup> Martin Arostegui. *Colombia: Venezuela Attacks Along Border*. At <http://washingtontimes.com/upi-breaking/20040105-115354-5925r.htm> (05 April 2004).

<sup>87</sup> Mark, Falcoff. *Facing Up the Conflict in Colombia*. American Enterprise for Public Policy Research. Washington. 2004. p. 2.

material assistance to leftist guerrillas in the border region. An analysis of this situation was mentioned in World Press Review,

The escalating war of words between the governments of Venezuela and Colombia over the deteriorating security conditions along their shared 1,375-mile border risks transforming Colombia's civil war into an international conflict. Commentators on both sides of the border expressed mounting anxiety that the beleaguered Venezuelan regime of President Hugo Chávez would exploit the volatile security environment to distract attention from the domestic opposition's campaign to force a recall referendum in August.<sup>88</sup>

Under those circumstances, it is hard to expect a common ground for agreement in the unsolved territorial disputes. Moreover, interestingly enough is the presence of two democratic elected presidents and the preponderance of one in military capabilities also having international support from the region's hegemon.

The following section will analyze to what extent regime type is an essential factor to understand the militarized disputes between these two countries.

## **B. REGIME TYPE AND COLOMBIAN-VENEZUELAN DYAD**

Venezuelans generally have tended to view Colombia as a violent and unstable country whose problems and people washed over the border into more peaceful and prosperous Venezuela. News of attacks on border posts, kidnappings of wealthy Venezuelan ranchers by Colombian guerrillas, and drug seizures during transshipment have reinforced this conception. However, incidents on territorial disputes had occurred during different time periods and regime type regardless of these perceptions or misperceptions.

As presented in the previous section, the relationship between Colombia and Venezuela is generally tense, and tensions tend to rise and fall depending on the specifics of the issue at hand. Table 1 presents a summary of the main incidents in the Venezuelan-Colombian dyad. A common factor, in all these

<sup>88</sup> Robert, Taylor. *Colombia-Venezuela Border Tension Rise*. World Press Review at <http://www.worldpress.org/Americas/1092.cfm> (10 April 2004).



cases, is the presence of territorial disputes. Also, in the incidents presented in Table 1, at least one country used some form of military force. For example, in 1952 and 1987, both countries sent military units to the area disputed (Gulf of Venezuela).

Mares argues that “the prevalence of disputed territorial borders in the region means that the method of resolution of a particular conflict, whether diplomatic or military, takes on more general significance”.<sup>89</sup> Hence, satisfaction with the territorial status quo is a necessary condition for the maintenance of peace between these two countries. Therefore, these incidents demonstrate that the use of military force is a method to acquire this satisfaction with the territorial status quo.

Table 1. Regime Type Vs Territorial Dispute Incidents

Incident	Regime Type	Country	Year	Use of Military Force
Rio de Oro	Democracy	Colombia	1928	No
Rio de Oro	Dictatorship Military	Venezuela	1928	Yes
Arauca Treaty	Democracy	Colombia	1941	Yes
Arauca Treaty	“Transitional” Military	Venezuela	1941	No
Admiral Padilla	Democracy	Colombia	1952	Yes
Admiral Padilla	Dictatorship Military	Venezuela	1952	Yes
Caldas	Democracy	Colombia	1987	Yes
Caldas	Democracy	Venezuela	1987	Yes

Also, the presence of a specific regime type does not prevent the occurrence of interstate incidents. In other words, just because both countries are well established democracies does not mean that the use of military force as

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<sup>89</sup> Mares (2001). p. 30.

a form of solution is not present. Perhaps the best example is the situation in 1987 where both countries were considered well-established democracies.

Actually, almost all possible combinations of regime type influence were present in Table 1, Democracy-Democracy (1941, 1987) and Democracy-Dictatorship (1928, 1952). For Kacowicz, the South American case is a vivid example of how nondemocracies can establish and maintain peaceful relations among themselves and with democracies as well.<sup>90</sup> Data in this case study do not support the hypothesis that domestic regimes make a difference in militarized disputes participation. For instance, the strongest evidence is that during the 'Caldas' incident both countries were democracies for a long time and both used great scale military mobilization.

Not enough numerical evidence exists to evaluate the role that the military balance of power has played in the relations of these two countries, because historical analysis of relative military power in Latin America is difficult using a quantitative methodology. Data on military budgets, arms expenditures, and imports are problematic until at least the 1970's.<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, the historical description of this chapter suggests that the balance of military power is important to understand the use of force in foreign policy. For example, in 1941, Venezuelan President Lopez Contreras signed the Treaty due to the pressure of Colombians troops on the common border. Colombia, during this time, also considered itself better prepared in military capabilities due to the confrontations with Peru during the Leticia War.

One other aspect to consider in this analysis is the consequences of the misperception of international incidents or conflicts. When the 1952 Admiral Padilla incident occurred, Colombia was under immense internal pressure, with a someone leading the government not elected by the people. In contrast, Venezuela was under a military dictatorship that expanded the military

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<sup>90</sup> Arie Kacowicz, *Zones of Peace in the Third World, South America and West Africa in Comparative Perspective*, (1998) p. 123.

<sup>91</sup> Martin, Needler. *United States Government Figures on Latin American Military Expenditures*. Latin American Research Review. 1973. p. 101.

capabilities of their Armed Forces. Hence, the response of the Colombians can be considered as reflecting an assumption of hostile intentions coming from a neighboring country due to arms expenditures. Here, the misperception of adversary capabilities could have a major impact on the process leading to war.

Consequently, as a form of analysis, three major issues can be considered in this case study. First, having no consensus or agreement in finding a solution for territorial disputes is, fundamentally, what has driven all incidents between Colombia and Venezuela.

Second, regime type is not a factor to be considered as catalytic for the use of force in every incident. Besides, the most important military mobilizations occurred during democratic regimes. Additionally, an external factor, such as the Cold War, does not appear to influence these events as both countries were allies with the United States against communism during the last incidents.

Some scholars argue “that the U.S. has managed inter-state relations, particularly conflict, in Latin America.”<sup>92</sup> According to Mares:

The arguments for U.S. determinism follow the logic that either conflict erupts when the U.S. fails to patrol the region or that U.S. policy actually stimulates conflict. The latter hypothesis, that the U.S. “mismanages” conflict, takes two forms: that the U.S. stimulates conflict either because of U.S. opposition to nationalism, or to communism...Force is used when the U.S. wants it, and also when the U.S. opposes its use. The strongest evidence exists for the anti-communism argument. Indeed, the period of the Cold War sees increase of military conflict in the region.<sup>93</sup>

Third, as described in this section, military force was used as a bargaining tool in diplomacy. As explained by Snyder: “...the function of military forces themselves may be shifting in the direction of a demonstrative role: the signaling of future intentions to use force in order to influence the enemy’s intentions, as opposed to being ready to use, or using, force simply as a physical means of

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<sup>92</sup> According to Mares (2001) “the list of scholars who casually assert that the U.S. has been able to control interstate conflicts in Latin America is long: Phillipe Schmitter, Carlos Portales, Helaraldo Munos, and Richard Millett, among others.

<sup>93</sup> Mares (2001). pp. 82-83.

conquest or denial.”<sup>94</sup> The use of this element, under different regime types and situations, is essential to understanding the perception that policy makers have to increase or use military power.

### **C. CONCLUSION**

This chapter explained the roots of tension in the Venezuelan-Colombian dyad. In summary, this resulted because the borders of the nations that emerged from the wars for independence were not clearly defined. The disparities between Venezuela and Colombia, however, have contributed to a fluctuating undercurrent of tension over the years. The most visible irritant in the relationship is the dispute over the boundary demarcation in the Gulf of Venezuela. Hence, the unsolved territorial demarcation still plays an important role in the relations of these two South American countries.

Also, this chapter compared regime type (democracy-dictatorship) and four different territorial incidents between the two countries. The historical relationship between Colombia and Venezuela has shown that during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the presence of autocracy or dictatorship is not a good explanation for the cause of using military force. Although theorists argue that well-established democracies do not fight each other since they are conservative powers, this case has demonstrated that these two democracies were close to engaging in a conventional war (1987), because they were not satisfied with their territorial status quo within and across their borders.

In addition, this chapter presented some of the problems from which the Venezuelan State started to suffer, due to the implementation of some programs from the Colombian State during the President Pastrana administration. The next sections of this thesis introduce these problems. This is a diagnosis of Plan Colombia. How was it originated? What are its main purposes and how does it affect the balance of power between the two nations?

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<sup>94</sup> Glenn, Snyder. *Theories on the Use of Force*, in *The Use of Force International Politics and Foreign Policy*. Edited by Robert Art, and Kenneth Waltz. Boston. Little, Brown and Company. 1971. p. 75.

In order to do so, the next chapter will present different aspects of the Plan Colombia. What was the military balance of power between these two nations before and after the implementation of Plan Colombia? Here, the central emphasis is to explain how the military sector represents the major percentage of resources used and how this affects Colombian-Venezuelan relations.

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## **IV. U.S. POLICY IN THE REGION: IMPLICATIONS OF PLAN COLOMBIA**

### **A. PLAN COLOMBIA: HISTORICAL REVIEW**

The United States government has in recent decades shown increasing preoccupation with ways to curb the drug supply from South America and particularly from Colombia, calling it a serious national security problem for the United States much as Communist expansion had been similarly described in the 1960's.

That 80 to 90 percent of the cocaine and a growing share of the heroin consumed in the United States came from one country necessarily placed the narcotics issue at the top of the bilateral agenda, between Colombia and the United States. Consequently, one of the ways to decrease the supply was to engage in programs for eradicating the source of the drugs. Throughout the Clinton years, a group of drug war hawks in the U.S. Congress had pushed the administration to do more in Colombia.

However, the initial thrust to eliminate this problem seems to have originated domestically in Colombia. On 8 June 1998, then candidate Andres Pastrana first proposed it during a campaign rally. He stated then that:

[D]rug trafficking, more than a judicial problem, is a social problem...Developed countries must help us execute a kind of Marshall Plan for Colombia, that will allow us to undertake large investments in the social, agricultural and infrastructure field, to offer our peasants different alternatives apart from illicit crops.<sup>95</sup>

President Pastrana claimed that social injustice was the breeding ground for instability, and that large foreign aid packages oriented towards social infrastructure would be a key element of his strategy to bolster political stability. Soon after the beginning of his government in August 1998, his administration began peace talks with the FARC guerrillas, during which government and rebel

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<sup>95</sup> Pastrana, '*Una Política de Paz para el Cambio*', Speech of the Presidency Republic Candidate, Bogotá, 8 de junio de 1998, in *Hechos de paz: El Presidente habla de Paz*. Tomo I. 1998-1999. Bogotá, 2002, p. 21.

envoys discussed the latter's possible role as administrator of a U.S. financed drug eradication campaign by which peasants in southern Colombia, an area of intense guerrilla activity, would be paid to switch to legal crops.<sup>96</sup>

During Pastrana's first state visit to Washington in October 1998, President Clinton announced an increase in military aid to Colombia and pledged to mobilize U.S. and international support for the peace process. By August 1999, Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering offered a substantial increase in U.S. aid if Colombia could create a comprehensive anti-drug strategy.<sup>97</sup>

The Colombian government responded with an initiative dubbed Plan Colombia, unveiled formally in September 1999, which proposed expenditures of \$7.5 billion. Colombia would contribute \$4 billion and would hope to raise, in the next months, with international solidarity, the other \$3.5 billion. The Colombian government defines Plan Colombia as an integral policy that looks to reiterate the commitment that the Colombian government has to look for a negotiated political solution to the conflict, under fundamental basic principles such as democracy, territorial integrity and the defense and protection of human rights.<sup>98</sup>

During the following year, the Clinton administration struggled to obtain congressional approval for the U.S. contribution to Plan Colombia. President Clinton justified US economic support to Colombia in March 2000 with the following words:

... [T]oday we are called upon to stand for democracy under attack in Colombia. Drug trafficking, civil conflict, economic stagnation, combine everywhere they exist, and explosively in Colombia, to feed violence, undercut honest enterprise in favor of corruption, and undermine public confidence in democracy. Colombia's drug

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<sup>96</sup> Miguel Herrera Zgaib, 'Guerra social de media intensidad', in *Plan Colombia: Ensayos críticos*, Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Facultad de Derecho, Ciencias Políticas y Sociales, 2001, p. 303.

<sup>97</sup> William M Leogrande & Kenneth Sharpe, 'Two wars or one? Drugs, guerrillas and Colombia's New Violencia', *World Policy Journal*, Fall 2000. pp. 1-11.

<sup>98</sup> Cárdenas, Mauricio. *Revista Cambio*, 6-13 March 2000.



traffickers directly threaten America's security. But first, they threaten Colombia's future.<sup>99</sup>

Plan Colombia was defined as a “comprehensive plan to seek peace, fight drugs, build the economy, and deepen democracy.”<sup>100</sup> In August 2000, during a visit to Colombia, Clinton claimed that the Plan’s objective was to achieve a better life for the people, for which it included a ten-fold increase in U.S. support for economic development, governance, judicial reform and human rights. It also offered human rights training for the Armed Forces and the National Police, while denying assistance to any military unit linked to human rights abuses.<sup>101</sup>

During its discussion in Washington, it soon became clear that Plan Colombia’s initial emphasis on social investment had changed. Clinton asked the U.S. Congress for \$1.6 billion in Colombian aid over two years, eventually obtaining authorization for \$1.3 billion. While Colombia still pledged to finance most of the social aspects of the Plan through its own funds, the vast majority of U.S. resources were approved for military aspects of the anti-drug campaign.<sup>102</sup>

In November 2000, US. Drug Czar Gen. Barry McCaffrey defended this new orientation affirming that security was one of the main challenges faced by Colombia, a situation which demanded strong military assistance from the United States to help the government regain legal control over the drug producing regions, particularly in the distant southern jungle region, in order to protect Colombian citizens and curtail illegal drugs production. In his description of the Plan, McCaffrey assured that it would work along two strategies. The first one

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<sup>99</sup> *President Clinton supports Plan Colombia*. Remarks by President Clinton to Council of the Americas 30th Washington Conference (as pertaining to Colombia) at <http://www.bend.k12.or.us/jewell2/colombia/politics/clinton.htm>. (June 2004)

<sup>101</sup> Palabras del Presidente Clinton al Pueblo de Colombia (2000). President Clinton Speech to the Colombian People, cited by Luis Eduardo Fajardo, “*From the Alliance for Progress to the Plan Colombia: A Retrospective Look at U.S. Aid to Colombia*.” Crisis States Programme Working papers series N° 1, 2003.

<sup>102</sup> Tickner, Arlene, “La guerra contra las drogas: las relaciones Colombia-EU durante la administración Pastrana”, in *Plan Colombia: Ensayos críticos*, Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Facultad de Derecho, Ciencias Políticas y Sociales, 2001.

would be the eradication of drug production in Southern Colombia, followed by village-level programs to support the local economy's transition to legal alternatives.

These programs included the development of the necessary infrastructure for marketing legal crops as well as technical assistance for peasant organizations. Concerning the military component of the Plan, McCaffrey assured that their government's policy was to abstain from directly supporting Colombian counterinsurgency efforts, focusing instead on anti-drug operations. However, the United States would provide support to the Colombian government to protect security forces directly related to anti-narcotics efforts.<sup>103</sup>

On paper, the plan seemed to provide all of the necessary elements needed to solve Colombia's economic crisis and to end the violence. When looking at the actual aid package offered by the United States, however, it became evident that it was severely unbalanced, with the majority of the funding, or 80% of the total aid package, granted to the Colombian military and police. The remainder of the aid package would be distributed as follows: 8% for social development programs, 6% for human rights programs, 4% for aid to the displaced, 2% for judicial reform, and 0.5% for supporting the ongoing peace process.<sup>104</sup> According to this data, the component that prevails is the one denominated cooperation in security and justice, which focused mainly on the fight against drug trafficking, by fortifying police and military forces.

## **B. U.S. MILITARY AID UNDER PLAN COLOMBIA**

Some authors argue that Plan Colombia is essentially a U.S. authored and promoted policy directed toward militarily elimination of the guerrilla forces in Colombia. As presented by James Petras, U.S. policymakers describe Plan Colombia as an effort to eradicate drug production and trade by attacking the sources of production located in areas of guerrilla influence or control. Since the

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<sup>103</sup> Washington News Service. "Palabras de Barry R. McCaffrey Director de la Oficina de Política Nacional de Control de Drogas, ante la Academia Diplomática de Colombia" (2000) at <http://usinfo.state.gov/espanol/colombia/001120.htm>. Cited by Luis Eduardo Fajardo (2003)

<sup>104</sup> Lara Jill Rosenblith. "Plan Colombia and the United States". At <http://environment.about.com/cs/pesticides/a/PlanColombia.htm> (25 April 2004)

guerrillas are associated with the coca producing regions, this line of argument proceeds, Washington has directed its military advisory teams and military aid to destroying what they call the "narco guerrillas".<sup>105</sup>

Guerrilla movements have been active in Colombia since the early 1960's, with 1960 having been a particularly hard year. Ever since the late 1940's, Colombia has been living with *La Violencia*.<sup>106</sup> Today, the Revolutionary Armed Force of Colombia (FARC) deploys a military force numbering close to 18,000 armed guerrillas active in most of the rural areas of Colombia. In Colombia, the combined guerrilla forces control or influence a wide strip of territory south of Bogotá toward the Ecuadorian border, northwest toward Panama and in several pockets to the east and west of the capital, in addition to urban militia units.

The central premise of the U.S. component of *Plan Colombia* is that money from the trade in illegal drugs, called narcotrafficking, feeds the funds of the guerrillas, whose attacks give rise to citizen self-defense organizations - the paramilitaries. If it were possible to stop or drastically reduce the narco funds, the guerrillas could not mount their ambitious military campaigns against the state, and society would not be as threatened.

All these insurgents and paramilitary activities damaged the Colombian military. The Colombian government tried to control the guerrillas' powerful force using its own military, but the situation is uncontrollable when "drugs became the gasoline fueling the war in Colombia".<sup>107</sup> The defeats suffered by Colombian military forces in 1997 and 1998 convinced the government of the need to strengthen and modernize the military.<sup>108</sup> Having been defeated several times, the Colombian government concluded that it was necessary to restructure the armed forces.

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<sup>105</sup> James Petras. *The Geo-Politics of Plan Colombia*. At [http://www.rebellion.org/petras/english/Petras\\_on\\_Plan\\_Colombia.pdf](http://www.rebellion.org/petras/english/Petras_on_Plan_Colombia.pdf). (September 10, 2003)

<sup>106</sup> Eduardo Pizano. *Plan Colombia: The view from The Presidential Palace*. At <http://www.miami.edu/nsc/publications/IPCseries/PCVIEW.PDF>. (04 April 2004).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>108</sup> Gabriel, Marcella. *US Strategy in Colombia: From Ambiguity to Clarity*. In *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*. Volume 10, Autumn 2001, N° 3. p. 96.

Beyond the development of a comprehensive national security strategy, the Colombian government needed to develop adequate instrumentalities to implement its strategy, especially a capable military force. Restructuring the Colombian Armed Forces needed strong economic support. That support came from the United States, which helped to develop a plan for “professionalizing the armed forces in Colombia and increasing their number to 452,000 by 2001 from the level of 12,000 that existed formerly.”<sup>109</sup>

As of 2002, the Colombian Army is bigger currently composed of 52,000 *professional soldiers* out of nearly 117,000, with perhaps 35,000 available for combat<sup>110</sup>, more aggressive and better led, organized, trained, motivated, and equipped. This is important because professional soldiers use technological sophistication as a method to replace brute force, and this is the key to victory.<sup>111</sup> An example of the Colombian military restructuring is the creation of the Rapid Deployment Force (Fuerza Rápida de Despliegue). This unit conducted important operations in 2001, including “Gato Negro” which captured the notorious Brazilian drug lord Fernandinho, who was trading money and arms for cocaine with the FARC.<sup>112</sup>

With the help of U.S. military aid, the Colombian military machine is making strides unseen in their history. As a result of this support, the Colombian Armed Forces are now superior in comparison with some of their neighbors in troops and mobility of personnel. As stated by Marcella in her work, *The U.S. Engagement with Colombia: Legitimated Authority and Human Rights*:

The top quantitative and qualitative requirements for any military organization are leadership, tactical mobility, intelligence, and quality of the troops. These must be complemented by logistical support, quick reaction, aggressive small unit operations, and cooperative relations with the civilian population. The Colombian

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<sup>109</sup> Eduardo Pizano (2001), p. 6.

<sup>110</sup> Gabriella Marcella. *The U.S. Engagement with Colombia: Legitimated Authority and Human Rights*. North South Agenda Papers. Number 55, March 2002.

<sup>111</sup> Charles, Moskos. *The postmodern Military: Armed Forces after the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. p, 19

<sup>112</sup> Gabriel, Marcella. (2001). p. 97.

Army's new aggressiveness takes advantage of improved mobility (going from 18 combat helicopters in 1998 to nearly 95 by the end of 2001) and battle-experienced field commanders.

The bulk of the military assistance supports three counter-narcotics battalions to the Colombian armed forces, which are to receive 16 UH-60 Black Hawk and 30 UH-1H Huey transport helicopters.<sup>113</sup> Basically, the Department of Defense training focuses on Colombian Army pilots, crew chiefs, and maintenance personnel in airmobile operations. Night vision training and advance or readiness level progression training will enhance the capabilities of survivability of these helicopters in infiltration of Colombian ground forces during counter terrorist or counter narcotics operations. In addition, training and logistics programs are on track to provide greatly enhanced air mobility capability to the Colombian Army.<sup>114</sup>

In sum, the Department of Defense, through the United States Southern Command, is training and equipping Counter Narcotics (CN) Brigades and riverine units, fielding Black Hawk helicopters, training pilots and crews, assisting with infrastructure upgrades, and providing counter drug intelligence support. They also continue to be responsible for military training and support missions.

Additionally impressive is the amount of money the Colombian government is spending in the military sector. According to the last report published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri), the world's military expenses are on their way to levels matching those of the Cold War. The United States represents 43% of the total world-wide defense expenditures and continues to grow. The exceptions to this tendency, according to Sipri's report, are: Venezuela, Argentina, Guatemala and Macedonia; the four nations that have undergone the most serious reductions in their military expenses worldwide.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Angel, Rabasa and Peter Chalk. *Colombian Labyrinth : The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability*. RAND. Santa Monica. 2001. p. 63.

<sup>114</sup> Jeffry, Waddell. *United States Army Special Forces Support to "Plan Colombia"*. U.S. Army War College. 2002. p. 10.

<sup>115</sup> SIPRI 2003 Year Book. At <http://editors.sipri.se/pubs/yb03/ch10.html> (21 April 2004).

As matter of fact, the growth of the Colombian arsenal does not have any precedent in Latin America, particularly if one observes the factors required to have a modern military institution within the context of modern military doctrine: leadership, tactical mobility, intelligence and quality of the troops through training.

Colombia's military expenditures (ME) rose at an average rate of over 5 % (7.2% growth rate between 1995 and 1999), with a ratio of 3.2% ME/GNP. Venezuela was the only country whose military expenditures did not grow over the same period of time. Moreover, Venezuela only has a 1.4% ratio of ME/GNP.<sup>116</sup>

Moreover, Plan Colombia, the third largest U.S. military aid program in the world, does not reflect the intricate and complex operations of the entire general military aid program that flows to Colombia from the United States.

Especially, it is necessary to add the intangible part of Plan Colombia, those singular factors such as the transference of know-how originating from the state of the art military organization with the best technology and military intelligence of the world. Furthermore, with Plan Colombia, U.S. military advisors are teaching and directing high tech warfare, and providing operational leadership in close proximity to the battlefield.

Training and a considerable number of arms and defense systems from the United States are transforming the Colombian Armed Forces into a very effective military machine in the region. According to Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, among the most significant changes in this transformation are first, a new vision of operation, with emphasis on mobility and rapid reaction, improvement of the collection and processing of information, and development of an integrated communications system.

Second, the development of a rapid deployment capability is transforming Colombian Armed Forces operations. The Colombian military now has a striking force of some 4,000, all professional soldiers who can be deployed anywhere in

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<sup>116</sup> U.S. Department of State, WMEAT 1999-2000. At [www.state.gov/t/vc/rls/rpt/wmeat/1999\\_2000/](http://www.state.gov/t/vc/rls/rpt/wmeat/1999_2000/) (4 April 2004)

the country. Third, in addition to better integrated operations with the land forces, the Colombian Air Force is now able to conduct night operations using night-vision equipment. Fourth is the improvement in intelligence collection. Better training and equipment has provided the Colombian military with improved signals intelligence (SIGINT).<sup>117</sup> To put it briefly, the new doctrine emphasizes mobility and presents a shift from a defensive to an offensive posture.

### **C. BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA**

Relations between Colombia and Venezuela are generally tense, with tensions tending to rise and fall depending on the specifics of the issue at hand.

The territorial dispute between Colombia and Venezuela is centered on control over the entrance to the Gulf of Venezuela. The Gulf of Venezuela dispute is a good example of a territorial dispute that becomes far more serious when a valuable resource, in this case oil, is involved. The key to establishing control of the disputed territories is ownership of the Los Monjes Islands, a chain of three tiny islands lying at the gulf's northern mouth. At stake in the dispute is control over a substantial amount of maritime territory in the Caribbean that extends into the gulf, an area popularly referred to by Colombians as the Coquibacoa Gulf.

By gaining recognition for its claim to the islands, which are said to be all but submerged at high tide, Colombia could expand national territory into the Caribbean by declaring the extension of its 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone around the islands. It would also be able to claim a portion of the waters of the gulf, located next to Venezuela's oil-rich Lago de Maracaibo, which, according to estimates of possible reserves, might contain as much as 10 billion barrels of oil.<sup>118</sup>

Although Colombia recognized Venezuelan sovereignty over Los Monjes in 1856, in 1934, under the liberal government of Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo, Colombia claimed Los Monjes under their jurisdiction. Why did Colombia adopt

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<sup>117</sup> Angel, Rabasa and Peter Chalk. (2001). pp. 101-102.

<sup>118</sup> Rafael Schwartz, *Los Monjes: Conflicto entre Venezuela y Colombia*. Bonalde Editores. Caracas. 1993. P-173. Translated by Omar Pina. p. 166.

this attitude? The answer is, according to some authors, that they considered themselves strong in the military arena. In September 1932, Colombia repelled a Peruvian invasion under the command of Colonel Oscar Ordoñez in the Amazon (Puerto de Leticia).<sup>119</sup>

The two countries conducted several unsuccessful rounds of negotiations during the 1970's and 1980's. However, a group of some 400 Venezuelan military officers publicly warned officials in Caracas not to make concessions to the Colombians; given the past history of Venezuelan military politics, this "warning" was taken seriously by the Venezuelan government, and the possible settlement was postponed.<sup>120</sup>

In August 1987, Colombian warships, including the missile frigate Caldas, entered disputed waters at the mouth of the gulf. Colombian Mirage fighters reportedly conducted over flights of the area and Venezuelan F-16 fighters were moved to a nearby air base and conducted several flights over the Colombian missile frigate. Open hostilities appeared imminent. Even after the withdrawal of the Colombian vessels by order of President Virgilio Barco Vargas, the armed forces of both nations remained on alert in the border area. The Venezuelan government maintained that the vessels' presence in the gulf for three full days represented an act of "intentional provocation" and sent a "strongly worded" formal protest to the Colombian president.<sup>121</sup>

The "Caldas Incident" had military implications for both sides. The military potential of Colombia and Venezuela, compared with other Andean countries, is high. During this skirmish both countries tested their military capabilities and discovered their weaknesses in the strategic and operational environment. As explained by Child:

The military implications of the dispute stem from the fact that both countries have middle size military establishments that are

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<sup>119</sup> Schwartz. p. 134.

<sup>120</sup> *Times of the Americas*, January 8, 1975. cited by Jack Child in *Geopolitics and Conflict in South America*. p. 154.

<sup>121</sup> Schwartz, p. 175.



respectable in regional terms. Both countries also have other disputes that make their own military demands and create the possibility of linkages between otherwise unrelated conflicts.<sup>122</sup>

Colombia has territorial disputes with Nicaragua over a series of Caribbean islands, cays and banks, and Venezuela has a territorial reclamation dispute with Guyana over “The Esequibo”, a territory representing almost two-thirds of Guyana’s territory. What exactly is the size of the military component of these two countries? Has the military strength of these two countries changed considerably after the last skirmish?

### **1. Military Capabilities**

During the “Caldas Incident,” Venezuelan and Colombian units were at the same military level. The Navy and Air Force of these two countries had almost the same capabilities (See Table 1). The only advantage the Colombian Armed Forces had in comparison to Venezuela is that Colombian ground forces are highly trained because of continued engagements with guerrilla groups<sup>123</sup>.

The 1989 total strength of the National Armed Forces in Venezuela (Fuerzas Armadas Nacionales-FAN) was estimated at 69,000, broken down into 34,000 army personnel, 10,000 navy, 5,000 air force, and 20,000 Armed Forces of Cooperation (Fuerzas Armadas de Cooperación-FAC), also known as the National Guard.<sup>124</sup> The 1988 Colombia total strength was estimated at 86,300: army, 69,000; navy 10,600; and air force, 6,700.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>123</sup> Schwartz, p. 174.

<sup>124</sup> Venezuela country guide. At <http://www.1upinfo.com/country-guide-study/venezuela/venezuela85.html> (5 September 2003).

Table 2. Colombian-Venezuelan Military Capabilities During “Caldas” Incident (From: Jane’s 28 July 2003 and Jane’s Fighting Ships 1987-1988)

Capabilities	Colombia		Venezuela	
<b>Personnel</b>	In 1988, total strength estimated at 86,300: army (69,000) navy (10,600), and air force (6,700).		In 1990 total strength of the National Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas Nacionales--FAN) estimated at 69,000, broken down into 34,000 army personnel, 10,000 navy, 5,000 air force, and 20,000 Armed Forces of Cooperation (Fuerzas Armadas de Cooperación--FAC)--also known as the National Guard.	
<b>Equipment</b>	Ground forces upgraded equipment in the 1980's with the purchase of tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided (TOW) antitank weapons and armored vehicles; other armored equipment mostly of World War II vintage. Major naval vessels included four submarines, four frigates, four large patrol ships, two fast attack craft, three river gunboats, two coastal patrol vessels, and eight river patrol craft. Air force equipment included jet fighters; antiaircraft missiles; and various ground attack aircraft.		Armor and artillery assets somewhat antiquated. Major naval vessels--including British-built "Constitution"-class fast attack craft, Italian "Lupo" missile frigates, and German Type 209 submarines--purchased during the 1970's. Air Force equipped with most modern weaponry, including United States F-16 and French Mirage fighters.	
	<b>Armed Forces<sup>(1)</sup></b>	<b>Armored Vehicles</b>	<b>Combat Aircraft<sup>(2)</sup></b>	<b>Naval Vessels<sup>(3)</sup></b>
Colombia	165,800	300	46	8
Venezuela	79,000	601	73	8
<b>Notes:</b>  1. Not including reserves. 2. Includes army and navy aviation, but not helicopters or combat-capable trainers. 3. Major surface combatants, missile craft and submarines included in naval vessel totals				

Strength of the Fleet	Patrol Submarine	Frigates	Patrol Ship	Fast Attack Craft	Coastal Patrol	Gunboats	Transport
Colombia	4	4	4	2	10	3	5
Venezuela	3	8	7	6	65	0	3

The Venezuelan Air Force (VAF) equipment represented Colombia's primary concern in air superiority. The VAF is a highly professional force that avails itself of the finest military equipment the United States and France has to offer. However, ground and sea forces strength during the time period covered was balanced.

According to Mares, after the “Caldas Incident” Colombia “dramatically increased the size of the armed forces, partly due to increased guerrilla activity, but also stimulated by Congressional concerns that during the crisis Venezuela’s superior military standing put Colombia to disadvantage”.<sup>125</sup> This alarm was reflected in the purchase of 13 Kfir fighters from Israeli Aircraft Industries (IAI) and 4 missile frigates.<sup>126</sup> This resulted in a more equal military balance of power between the two countries.

Although Mares suggested that “the distribution of overall military power is not a major factor in Latin America’s violent peace” the figures in this case study indicate the contrary. The Colombian government, after testing Venezuelan military capabilities, applied a realist approach. A “realist world is a world in which the use of military force cannot be eliminated, and at best is deterred by superior force.”<sup>127</sup> It seems that Colombian policy was driven by security concerns. That being the case, security in this relation leads to concern with the balance of military power. However, even with this increase in military capabilities, Colombia had not overcome its internal violence. During the late 1980’s, the increased threat to Colombia’s national security posed by renewed guerrilla activities and the growing power of Colombian narcotics traffickers, provided the rationale for considerable increases in military expenditures (Table 3).

Table 3. Defense Expenditure (From: The Military Balance 2002-2003. The international Institute for Strategic Studies)

	US \$m			Number in Armed Forces		Reservist	Paramilitary
	1985	2001	2002	1985	2002	2002	2002
<b>Colombia</b>	823	2,839	2,840	66.2	158.0	60.7	104.6
<b>Venezuela</b>	1,855	1,881	1,081	49.0	82.3	8.0	23.0

As expressed previously in this chapter, during the 1990’s, several military defeats led the Colombian government to reform its armed forces. In order to make these reforms, Colombia needed economic support: they needed a plan.

<sup>125</sup> Mares, p. 129.

<sup>126</sup> Schwartz, p. 211.

<sup>127</sup> Mares, p. 111.

With the help of the United States, the Colombian government implemented “Plan Colombia”. The execution of this plan is creating new scenarios that affect regional stability. How did the implementation of this plan change the military balance of power between Colombia and Venezuela?

**D. BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA AFTER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PLAN COLOMBIA**

Colombian Military Forces are represented by three traditional branches: Army, Navy and Aviation. It is necessary to add the National Police to all three branches, which is part of the Ministry of the Defense, but separated into two main blocks: Colombian Military Forces (FMC) and Police Armed Forces (FAP).

The operative arm of the Ministry of the Defense structure has exerted a constant fight against the drug cartels that traditionally have operated in Colombia. Similarly, they constantly confront the Colombian guerrilla (FARC, ELN, ELP) and other paramilitary groups that at the moment challenge the Colombian government.

Before the implementation of Plan Colombia, “infantry weapons and ammunitions were in ample supply, but shortages of crew-served pieces and communications gear remained severe. Transportation of all sorts, whether trucks or helicopters, was all but absent.”<sup>128</sup>

According to an American military instructor familiar with both countries, from an operational and logistical point of view

the Colombian problem was very similar to the Venezuelan but probably worse. They couldn’t move, they couldn’t talk with each other, they couldn’t shoot, they had no intelligence and they had no logistical support. In sum they could not support themselves in the field.<sup>129</sup>

During the government of President Andrés Pastrana, with regard to Plan Colombia, an equipment reconstruction, training and psychological recovery of

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<sup>128</sup> Thomas, Mark. *Colombian Army Adaptation to FARC Insurgency*. Strategic Studies Institute. 2002. p. 13.

<sup>129</sup> Interview between R. Kempf, Lt Col, U.S. Army, Venezuelan Infantry School Instructor. Fuerte Tiuna, Caracas., and the author, 30 March 2004.

the Military Forces began. All these implied better conditions in case of counterinsurgency fights and any time when facing a case scenario of conflict. The U.S. Research Service summarized the growth of U.S. assistance,

U.S. assistance to Colombia, virtually all of it related to counternarcotics efforts, has increased steadily since FY1995. The United States has provided equipment, supplies, and other aid for the counternarcotics efforts, initially largely to the Colombian National Police (CNP), but recently increasingly to the Colombian military. As of FY2000, more is being provided to the military.<sup>130</sup>

According to Cynthia Arnson, the U.S. contribution to Plan Colombia became defined by its largest component: military assistance. Some 80% of the \$1.6 billion package unveiled in January 2000 was for military and police purposes, including the purchase of 63 Blackhawk and Huey helicopters, the training of special army anti-narcotics battalions, and other support for drug interdiction and eradication efforts.<sup>131</sup>

The scope of U.S. assistance to the Colombian government under Plan Colombia widened in 2002. Aid previously granted for counter-narcotics operations will now include security assistance to enable the government to combat illegal armed groups.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has been a major source of funding and support for Colombian counternarcotics efforts, mainly through programs not considered “traditional foreign aid” programs.<sup>132</sup> The spectrum of military aid, from the Department of Defense to Colombia, after the implementation of this plan is broad. Among them are:

DOD provides support for efforts to detect and monitor illicit narcotics operations, principally the maintenance of five radar sites in Colombia. DOD also conducts surveillance overflights from locations outside Colombia. During 1999, DOD helped establish,

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<sup>130</sup> Nina, Serafino. (2001). *Colombia: U.S. Assistance and Current Legislation*. Congressional Reserve Service. The Library of the Congress. At <http://www.fas.org/man/crs/RL30541.pdf> [20 April 2004] p. 1.

<sup>131</sup> Cynthia, Arnson. *The Peace Process in Colombia and U.S. Policy*. Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies. University of Notre Dame. (2001). p. 19.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

train and equip the first special Colombian Army counternarcotics battalion (CACB) of some 950 troops, which commenced operations towards the end of that year. The battalion was set up to conduct its own CN missions, as well as to provide security for the police counternarcotics forces in their operations. DOD also sponsors a riverine CN program, training personnel of the Colombian Navy and Marines to control narcotics trafficking along Colombia's extensive network of rivers.<sup>133</sup>

The greatest assistance to the Colombian Army and Police Forces is in the development of a rapid deployment capability (counternarcotics battalions) and air mobility (helicopters). The three counternarcotics battalions established with U.S. assistance provide assistance for the army. The special counternarcotics unit provides assistance to the police.

The total package of Plan Colombia helicopter assistance for counter drugs operations was renegotiated after legislation was passed on July 18, 2000 during the Clinton administration. As a result, Colombia received in total under Plan Colombia funding 33 UH-1Ns, 30 Huey IIs, and 16 UH-60s (Blackhawks). Of these, all 33 UH -1Ns have been delivered to the Colombian Army, 18 in October 2000, and 15 on February 2, 2001. Of the UH-60s, 14 will be provided to the army and two to the police. All weaponry has been delivered to the Army counternarcotics battalions (i.e., 120 M-60 machine guns, 36 M-24 sniper rifles, 12 Mark-19 automatic grenade launchers, and 24 60 mm mortars).<sup>134</sup>

In order to reinforce this military aid, on April 9, 2001, the Bush Administration requested \$731 million in FY2002 funding for a broader regional strategy called the Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI) that would include funding from the International Narcotics Control account (INC) for not only Colombia, but also Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela (Table 3). For Colombia, the Bush Administration request for FY2002 provided continued support for Plan Colombia legislation programs. The \$399 million requested for Colombia includes \$252.5 million for counternarcotics and security programs.

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<sup>133</sup> Serafino, p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> Serafino, p. 21.

The \$252.5 million for counternarcotics and security programs in Colombia includes \$87.5 million for support to the Colombian National Police, including funds for eradication, for aviation support, training, equipment and infrastructure, and for logistical support; \$79.5 million to training, operational support, logistical support, and capital investment for the Army's Huey II and UH-60 helicopters; \$26.5 million to improve the infrastructure supporting counternarcotics operations, particularly for force protection purposes; \$13.5 million for Colombian Army units involved in counternarcotics operations; \$43.0 million in support for air, maritime, riverine, and ground interdiction; \$2.5 million in program support.<sup>135</sup>

Table 4. President Bush's Andean Regional Initiative (ARI) (From: Reference Sheet, 150 Account, provided by the Department of State, May 14, 2001, quoted by Serafino. p. 23)

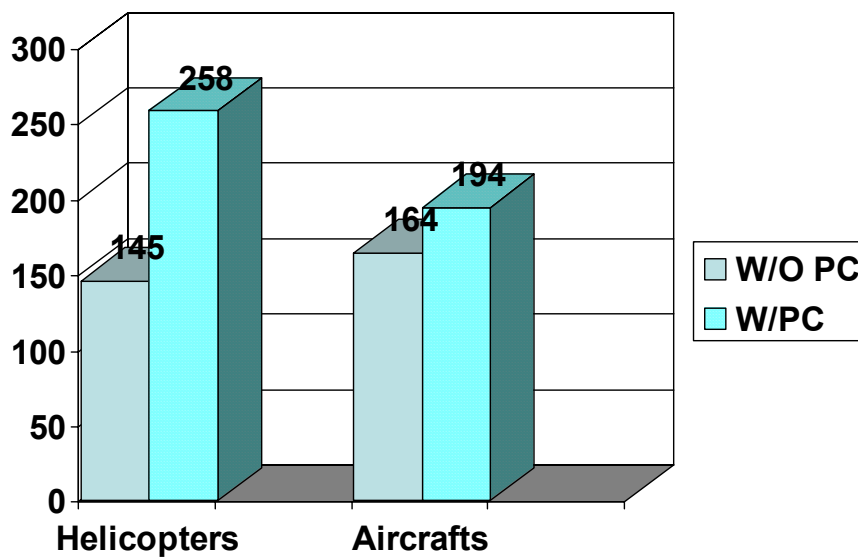
Country	Total ARI	ARI Proposed Funding By Purpose		International Narcotics Control (i.e., the Andean Counterdrug Initiative, ACI )
		Economic/Social/ Governance	Counter-narcotics and Security	
<b>Colombia</b>	<b>399.00</b>	146.50	<b>252.50</b>	<b>399</b>
<b>Bolivia</b>	143.48	88.48	55.0	102
<b>Brazil</b>	26.18	11.18	15.0	15
<b>Ecuador</b>	76.48	56.48	20.00	39
<b>Panama</b>	20.50	8.50	12.00	11
<b>Peru</b>	206.15	128.15	78.00	156
<b>Venezuela</b>	<b>10.50</b>	0.50	<b>10.00</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Totals</b>	882.29	439.79	442.5	731

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

This assistance is increasing Colombia's military capabilities exponentially. Additionally, according to this data (Table 3), funds from the Andean Counterdrug Initiative are directly supporting military programs not only used in counternarcotics operations but also in counterinsurgency operations.

To summarize, since the mid-1990's U.S. aid to Colombia's security forces has grown as fast as a dot-com stock price. Totalling approximately \$65 million in 1996, assistance more than quadrupled by 1999 to just under \$300 million and will reach about \$3 billion in 2004. The Colombian State can deploy or use all this military apparatus for conventional military operations at any time.

According to the Colombian National Department of Planning in their 2004 report, with Plan Colombia military implementation, military forces incremented their capacity in helicopter 78% and in aircraft 18% (Figure 3 ). It represents a change from 145 helicopters to 258, and from 164 aircraft to 194.



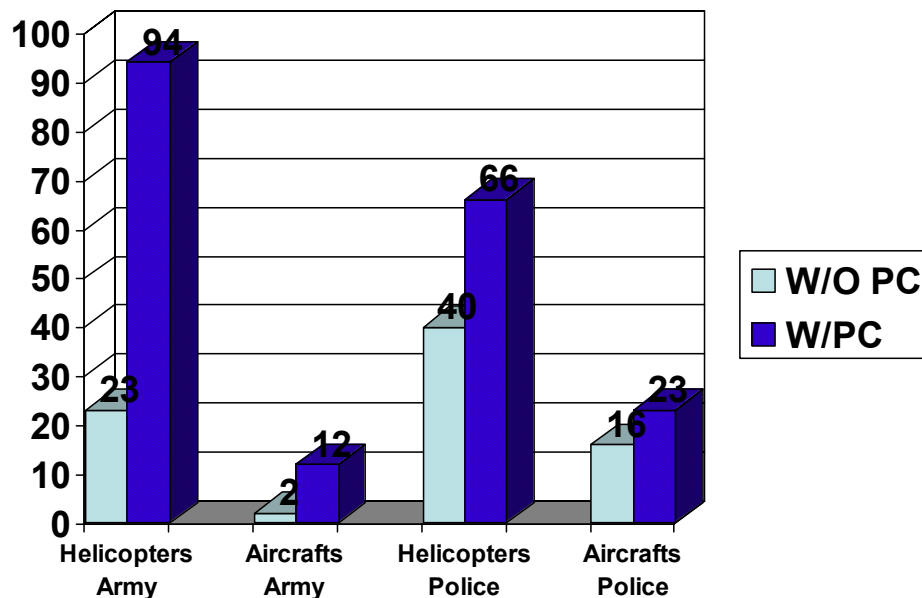
Source: Colombian Ministry of Defense, 2003

Figure 3. Air Mobility Capacity in Colombia after Plan Colombia Implementation

Particularly important is the air mobility capacity increment reached by the Army and the Police Forces (Figure 4). In the first case, the number of



helicopters jump from 23 to 94 and the number of aircraft from 2 to 12, which represent a total increase of 324%. In the case of the police, the change is from 40 to 66 helicopters and from 16 to 23 aircraft, an increment of 59% in their air mobility capacity. Additionally, with national resources, the Army tactical capabilities were incremented with the purchase of 14 heavy armor helicopters.<sup>136</sup>



Source: Colombian Ministry of Defense, 2003

Figure 4. Army and Police Air Mobility Capabilities after Plan Colombia

As a result of this increase of air mobility capacity, Colombia is able to transport a considerable number of ground units. This 324% increment is significant if compared with only 26 helicopter units in Venezuela with an availability of 34% (Percentage of mission capability rate). Colombia maintains an average of 77% (Percentage of mission capability rate) with a total of 258 helicopters.

The centerpiece of U.S. aid to the Colombian Air Force in 1999 was a program to upgrade its fleet of Vietnam-era A-37 Dragonfly intercept aircraft. The

<sup>136</sup> Departamento Nacional de Planeación. *Plan Colombia: Resultados 1999-2003*. At [http://www.soberania.info/Archivos/Plan\\_Colombia\\_resultados\\_1999\\_2.pdf](http://www.soberania.info/Archivos/Plan_Colombia_resultados_1999_2.pdf) [05 April 2004]

State and Defense Departments spent about \$21 million on A-37 upgrades and pilot training in 1999. While additional money funds runways and other improvements at air force bases, particularly at Tres Esquinas, the new aid proposal would also upgrade Air Force OV-10 Bronco aircraft for air intercept missions. A comparison of air power capabilities between both countries, demonstrates that they possess almost the same combat capacity (Table 5).

Table 5. Combat Aviation (From: The Military Balance 2002-2003. The international Institute for Strategic Studies

Combat Aviation (July 2000)			
Venezuelan Air Force		Colombian Air Force	
Type	Quantity	Type	Quantity
F-16	22	KFIR	13
MIRAGE 50	14	MIRAGE	11
VF-5	10	A-37	14
OV-10	10	OV-10	10
AT-27	21	PUCARA	03
		AC-47	04
		AT-27	13
TOTAL:77 Aircrafts		TOTAL: 68 Aircraft	

However, this A-37 and OV-10 upgrade is especially important because these aircraft are not only used for COIN (counterinsurgency) operations but also for Air to Ground and Close Air Support (CAS) operations. In fact, these types of aircraft are mainly used to support ground units. Therefore, they can be employed at any moment in conventional warfare. Perhaps more important, is the average of availability these systems possess after this significant contribution. Additional assistance for FY 2004 “is to include C-130 transport aircraft and helicopters, as well as the recondition of AC-47 gunship.”<sup>137</sup>

In summary, because of this economic support from the United States for counternarcotics and counterinsurgency operations, a significant increase in the development of military capabilities and infrastructure has taken place in the Colombian Armed Forces.

<sup>137</sup> The Military Balance 2002-2003. p. 176.

This led to the question, is Plan Colombia creating an imbalance in military power between Colombia and Venezuela? Basically, the military balance is an assessment of the relative strengths of the two countries' armed forces. In this case, the military implementation of Plan Colombia is creating an imbalance in some categories where the quantitative assessment of equipment has increased. So the answer is yes. The execution of Plan Colombia in its different phases has created a military imbalance between Colombia and Venezuela in areas such as Air Mobility, Air Interception, Close Air Support, Special Operation Units and Air Defense.

What cannot be measured, but has a significant value, is the qualitative change in capabilities due to the U.S military aid to Plan Colombia. Quantitatively, it is possible to measure the assessment of personnel strength and equipment holdings but it is not possible to measure or evaluate the quality of units or equipment, nor the impact of doctrine, military technology, deployment, training, logistic support, tactical or strategic initiative. Or can we?

All these previously cited aspects constitute part of the **package** the Colombian armed forces are receiving. The bulk of the equipment is helicopters and radars but the real value is the **know how** assistance. In other words, it is the way Colombian armed forces are using new capabilities in real combat situations. The doctrine in use is the U.S. experience in other COIN operations in Latin America. This is what practically makes a real difference if comparing both armed forces. As expressed by Rabasa and Chalk, "clearly, not all of the lessons of the Salvadoran war of 20 years ago are applicable to Colombia today, but some experiences apply, particularly at the operational and tactical level".<sup>138</sup>

In fact, what constitutes a good factor to analyze in this comparison is the use of top intelligence collection. U. S. aid has provided the Colombian military with improved signals intelligence (SIGINT). Using this critical factor has guaranteed successful operations against guerrillas in 2003. In sum, considerable experience, equipment, and intelligence sharing counter-insurgent

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<sup>138</sup> Angel, Rabasa and Peter Chalk. Colombian Labyrinth : The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability. RAND. Santa Monica. 2001. p. 96.

and anti-drug roles have forged the Colombian Army, Air Force, Navy and National Police into a relatively professional and competent service, almost exclusively directed towards counter-guerrilla operations.

In contrast, the Venezuelan armed forces have remained at almost the same levels of military strength. From 1950 to 1986, Venezuelan military spending as a percentage of gross domestic product averaged between 1.5 percent and 2 percent. Since 1985 to 2003, Venezuela's defense expenditure has decreased considerably if compared with Colombia (Table 3).

However, Venezuela has completed some armament requests which have increased since 1998. These included some orders and deliveries from different countries such as: Surface to Air Missiles (SAM), radars (Flycatcher), and train/combat aircrafts (AMX-T).<sup>139</sup> Perhaps the most significant of these requests are Venezuela's intention to buy a new type of fighter and helicopters. Since 2002, Venezuela has studied the purchase of MIG-29 and Mi helicopters from Russia. These intentions increased in 2004 after the Colombian government announced the purchase of 40 Spanish tanks. "The Russian news agency Tass is said to have reported that the talks between the two countries (Russia and Venezuela) resumed last month over the purchase of between 12 and 24 MIG-29 fighters."<sup>140</sup>

In September 2003, President Uribe and Colombia's Minister of Defense announced the process of modernization of Colombia's Air Force. The Minister, Marta Lucia Ramirez expressed: "what we are looking for is that when this internal conflict is over the Colombian Air Force must be a dissuasive force against any external or internal threat in regard to air space and national sovereignty."<sup>141</sup> This scenario is not new between both nations.

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<sup>139</sup> The Military Balance 2002-2003. p. 320.

<sup>140</sup> Magnus, McGrandle. *Venezuelan Talks over Purchase of Russian MIG's 'ongoing'*. The Daily Journal. Caracas. 4 April 2004.

<sup>141</sup> Sistema de Información de la Defensa Nacional de Colombia. *Fuerza Aérea Traza Directrices en lucha contra el terrorismo*. At <http://www.mindefensa.gov.co> [16 April 2004]  
Translated by Omar Pina.

## **1. Present Trends and Prospects for the Future**

President Uribe has pledged to end the conflict with the guerrillas by the end of his term in 2006. As part of Uribe's counter-insurgency campaign, the Colombian armed forces are being expanded from 147,000 to 200,000 personnel. The rapid reaction force, Fuerza de Despliegue Rápida (FUDRA), has elevated their number to three mobile brigades and Special Forces brigades. Moreover, the Army will also incorporate two mobile brigades in addition to those FUDRA. The Army expects they will have three more mobile brigades added to the order of battle each year for the next three years. Meanwhile, the Colombian National Police have expanded by 16,000 to a total of 121,000 by the end of 2003.

The cross-border security situation between Colombia and Venezuela worsened with an increase in guerrilla movement and drug trafficking. FARC has executed a number of attacks both on the border and in Venezuela, leading to fears that the Colombian civil war could become an international conflict. With continued instability in Venezuela, and further attempts by opposition groups to oust President Hugo Chávez, there is a possibility that the threat or use of force will be present in the near future.

According to Russett "the threat or use of force will be directed against states that a democracy perceives as politically unstable". Russett argues that:

If we expand the notion of political instability to include domestic political threat to the government because of its economic policy shortcomings, or competition in close election, this gives us a temporal context for the possible use of military force by democracies. It suggests that the 'unstable' state will initiate, or escalate, the use of force in a diplomatic dispute.<sup>142</sup>

Under the present conditions, both countries can be then categorized as democratic, elected governments with internal instability. Therefore, a military interstate dispute is highly likely. According to some Venezuelan military officials, "there is a high percentage of probabilities of a military confrontation after the last

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<sup>142</sup> Bruce, Russett. *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for Post Cold World*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993. p. 36.

phase of Plan Colombia basically because of three things: first there has been almost no progress on the limitation of marine and submarine waters discussions; second the strategic advantage that Colombian armed forces will have after this process with no internal threat; and third is the level of distrust of Colombians in Venezuela.”<sup>143</sup>

Thus, this perception (or misperception?) of the hostility of the adversary’s intention is particularly important because, in the short term it can induce one to take counteractions (in the extreme case, a preemptive strike) that trigger a conflict spiral and unnecessary war, and in the long term it can lead to an arms race or system of alliances and counter-alliances.”<sup>144</sup>

Additionally, Russett argues that there are possibilities of a military conflict between states where one or both state’s status as a democracy leaves some basis for doubt. “Perceptions of instability may also be based on a high degree of violent opposition to the democratic government: a democracy under siege of domestic terrorism, insurgency, or civil war is one in which the ostensible norms of peaceful conflict resolution simply are not working well.”<sup>145</sup>

To summarize, this case study presents two countries with no territorial satisfaction and where the effects of democratization are constrained by internal problems: civil war or extreme political instability. That being the case, the Kacowicz explanation for maintenance of peace falls short in these case studies. As expressed by Kacowicz,

It will be premature to characterize the Colombian-Venezuelan relations as a firmly institutionalized stable peace. In March 1995, following the cross-border attacks by Colombian guerrillas on Venezuelan soldiers posted at the frontier, both countries increased

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<sup>143</sup> Interview between J. Linares, Colonel, Venezuelan Army, Venezuelan Ministry of Defense. Operations Chief of Staff. Fuerte Tiuna, Caracas., and the author, 02 April 2004

<sup>144</sup> Michael Sullivan, “Power in Contemporary Politics”, *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict* (1990) p. 18.

<sup>145</sup> Russett (1993). p. 37.

their military presence along their common border, so that an armed conflagration between them still remains a possibility.<sup>146</sup>

Consequently, the democratic peace theory is not the sine qua non policy for all western democracies. In this case study, both countries under a democratic regime have historically had military skirmishes. In view of the present situation, there are high probabilities of inter democratic conflict because unsolved territorial claims exists as well as an imbalance of military power. Also both countries experience political instability. For that reason, the democratic peace theory does not apply to this case study.

Conversely, Venezuela's actual response can be considered an internal effort. In other words, increments in military capabilities will be a method for the Venezuelan government to reestablish equilibrium. That equilibrium will create an environment to promote a more stable peace between both nations. This scenario corresponds with the theory that in Latin America, when power is equally distributed, states will be more likely to refrain from war.

On the other hand, this effort will increase the security dilemma and could trigger a spiral model scenario that certainly makes war more possible. Actually, current perceptions of neighbor intentions in increasing military capabilities can be critical during the actual serious political situation that both countries are experiencing.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The democratic peace theory has been strongly criticized by realists on statistical grounds. Several studies have revealed several problems with this assertion. Some of these statistical analyses reveal that it is not clear that democracies do not fight one another.<sup>147</sup> The case study presented in this chapter is a good example of that criticism. Here, the presence of military skirmishes between the two longest liberal democracies in Latin America does

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<sup>146</sup> Arie Kacowicz, *Zones of Peace in the Third World, South America and West Africa in Comparative Perspective*, (1998) p. 87.

<sup>147</sup> John, Byrnes. *The Myth of the Democratic Peace*. In *Political Paradigm: New Faces of Democracy*. Fall 2002. p. 29.

not support the democratic peace theory. Hence, the expectation is that the imbalanced country will initiate some kind of response not taking into consideration the nature of the political regime.

Also, as seen in this chapter, Plan Colombia has created an imbalance of military power in some areas between these two countries. The balance of power is important in the relations of some Latin America countries because there is less chance they will engage in a militarized interstate dispute if military parity exists among those states. Thus, if power theorists are correct, parity should mean both fewer wars and less violent militarization of disputes. In Mares words, “parity brings peace because neither side can reasonably sure of winning a war at acceptable cost.”<sup>148</sup>

In this case, Venezuela’s response to the imbalance created has been a natural reaction to security concerns. That being the case, security in this relation is related to the balance of military power. Therefore, the military balance of power is important because it creates a more sustainable base to maintain peace between both countries.

Venezuela’s response of increasing military capabilities to restore the balance is a natural solution of the weaker state that feels threatened and is taking actions to restore the balance. Consequently, this attitude corresponds to a realist approach. Hence, this attitude justifies the second hypotheses: *Venezuela’s response could fall into an internal effort (increase military capabilities) to reestablish equilibrium or allies.*

However, a spiral model scenario is also present in this case study. Political instability, civil war and territorial disputes mixed with the presence of economical interests in both countries create an atmosphere of misperceptions of the adversary’s intentions concerning their military capabilities. This is related to the previous realist approach because military buildup can be considered as a preparation leading to war. Thus, in this case, perception of the other’s intentions

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<sup>148</sup> Mares. (2001) p. 113.



plays a great role in the outcome of possible conflict. Thus, if the spiral model is correct, it will have a major impact under present conditions between these South American countries.

It is difficult to assert which theory is correct. It is also difficult to infer which theory could predict the outcomes of the current situation. What can be said about this scenario is that Plan Colombia is likely to increase tension and instability in the long Colombian-Venezuelan dyad, because the military implementation of Plan Colombia broke military equilibrium and a clear perception of neighbor intentions with respect to new military capacities does not exist.

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## V. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the research question: ***Is Plan Colombia creating an imbalance of military power in the region? Does it matter?*** The theoretical framework for balance of power and the explanation of peace in Latin America have already been discussed in detail in Chapter II. Consequently, this chapter will briefly summarize those arguments and analyze them with the case study. Also, this chapter presents the major findings of this research and evaluates the prospects for Colombian-Venezuelan relations. Finally, the chapter offers policy recommendations.

### A. BALANCE OF POWER AND ZONE OF DEMOCRATIC PEACE

Chapter II explored the applicability of democratic peace and balance of power theory. Many scholars have tried to determine the factors that promote peace and stability. Realists believe that the external factors of power and the threat of force are the answer; while others propose there is a more complex solution involving the internal politics of a nation. Regime type has been the focus of this explanation. Some scholars argue that democracies almost never fight each other. Particularly in South America, Arie Kacowicz argues that the absence of international wars, the effects of democratization and satisfaction with the status quo, are the different explanations for the maintenance of peace in this region of the Western Hemisphere.

On the other hand, power analysts disagree about whether parity or preponderance diminishes the likelihood of military conflict. Most of the time, the theoretical literature on the distribution of power and war examines the question from a systemic perspective. As a consequence, policymakers in Latin America often focus on the regional or bilateral distribution of power to explain military conflict. Consequently, if balance of power theorists are correct, parity should mean both fewer wars and less violent militarization of disputes. The reasoning is simple. Parity brings peace because neither side can be reasonably sure of winning a war at acceptable cost. According to Mares, the parity thesis finds strong support in the major crises in the last 26 years in Latin America. Out of

fourteen disputes, only three involved parity and none escalated (Peru-Chile 1976; Colombia-Venezuela 1986; Venezuela-Colombia 1993). Consequently, it appears that balance of power theories could explain Colombian-Venezuelan relations.

## **B. HISTORICAL EVIDENCE**

Territorial disputes have been common in Latin America. Many of these disputes date back to the time of independence. This is the case between Colombia and Venezuela. The disparities between Venezuela and Colombia have contributed to a fluctuating undercurrent of tension over the years. The most visible irritant in the relationship is the dispute over the boundary demarcation in the Gulf of Venezuela. Hence, the unsolved territorial demarcation still plays an important role in the relations of these two South American countries.

The historical relation between Colombia and Venezuela has shown that during the 20<sup>th</sup> century the presence of regime type is not a good explanation for the use of military force in Colombia-Venezuela skirmishes (Chapter III). Although theorists argue that well established democracies do not fight each other since they are conservative powers, this case has demonstrated that these two democracies were close to engaging in a conventional war (1987). Additionally, having no consensus or agreement in finding a solution for territorial disputes is fundamentally what has driven all incidents between Colombia and Venezuela. It is also important to mention that in this relationship, military force was used as a bargaining tool in diplomacy.

## **C. RELEVANCE OF PLAN COLOMBIA IN THIS RELATIONSHIP**

Chapter IV explained the origins of Plan Colombia and the impact of the military aid from the United States on the Colombian Armed Forces. Both countries were in almost a military equilibrium during the development of the 'Caldas' incident in 1987. Due to the increase of violence with insurgent groups, Colombia increased its levels of military expenditures. However, this did not significantly affect the military balance with Venezuela. The implementation of Plan Colombia in its different phases created a military imbalance between

Colombia and Venezuela in areas such as Air Mobility, Air Interception, Close Air Support, Special Operation Units and Air Defense. However, the knowledge gained from the Plan Colombia package is the main factor creates an imbalance in the military capabilities between these two countries.

The review of Venezuela's military expenditures suggests that there might be a perception of other possible uses of all the new equipment after Colombia completes the last stage of this program. News of Venezuela's intentions to buy MIG 29's and Colombia's plans to buy tanks from Spain indicate that a spiral model is possible. Put in Jervis's words, "when states seek the ability to defend themselves, they get too much and too little...unless the requirements for offense differ in kind and amount, a status quo power will desire a military posture that resembles that of an aggressor."<sup>149</sup>

The current situation between both countries is not moving in a favorable direction. During the first part of 2004, tension increased between both countries. According to some political opposition in Venezuela, the government is driving this country to a conflict as a response to the political instability. "Let Colombia know that Chavez is dragging us into a veiled fratricidal war to defend his illegitimate aim to stay in power."<sup>150</sup> On the other hand, some of Colombia's political figures indicated in 2004 that "President Uribe has as an objective to prepare a invasion to Venezuela with Colombia's armed militias and the help of the United States using Plan Colombia."<sup>151</sup>

Consequently, it has become more likely that after the imbalance created by Plan Colombia, one of the countries will use military force or threats as a mode to resolve old border disputes as part of a solution for their domestic political process.

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<sup>149</sup> Robert Jervis. "*Perception and Misperception in International Politics*". Princeton. Princeton University Press. (1976). p. 64.

<sup>150</sup> Diego, Urdaneta. US, Colombia 'Invasion' Of Venezuela Is Chavez Ploy: Opponents. Agence France-Presse. 13 May 2004.

<sup>151</sup> Chávez facilitará estadía de Gloria Gaitán en Venezuela. Cadena Global.com. At <http://www.cadenaglobal.com/Default.asp?pgm=detail&Not=67977&Sec=6> [17 April 2004].

## **D. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The primary purpose of this thesis was to answer two major questions. Is Plan Colombia creating an imbalance of military power in the region? Does it matter? The Colombian-Venezuelan dyad case study represented a very strong response to answer these questions. Yes, Plan Colombia has created a military imbalance in the region. Moreover, the balance of power does matter because there are factors that still represent friction between some countries in the Western Hemisphere. There are residual issues that could feed national antagonism in Latin America. There are border disputes as well as national claims to resources across national borders, which is what fueled the case study presented in this thesis.

Based on the analysis of the development of the distribution of power between these two countries after the military implementation of Plan Colombia, these are some recommendations that, in the author's view, should be implemented to encourage a peaceful resolution of the multiple conflicts present.

### **1. United States of America Recommendations**

The U.S. policy toward Latin America has historically oscillated between interventionist impulses and strategic denial.<sup>152</sup> During the Cold War, the threat for the United States was the spread of communism in the Western Hemisphere. Cuba no longer dominates U.S. geopolitical fears. Today, the threat for the United States is drugs. Drugs are considered a national security threat. In the 1990's, drugs dominated U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America. Hence, drug cartels must be defeated in order to secure the United States from the consequences created by this threat.

The U.S. policy has been solely to support Colombia in the fight against narcotics trafficking. Since 2001, U.S. policy has now shifted to include counter-terrorism. This policy included aid with military equipment and training assistance to Colombian armed forces. Thus, this aid has created a strategic imbalance in

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<sup>152</sup> General Fred, Woerner. *Some Thoughts on Hemispheric Security and Leadership*. Berkeley: University of California. 1993. p. 35.

the military relations between Colombia and Venezuela. Then, if the balance of power does matter in Latin America relations, the implications of this U.S policy in the region are very important.

This thesis recommendation for the U.S. policy maker is to take into consideration the implication of addressing the drug problem with military forces in the region. It is not just detention and monitoring of drug trafficking as it used to be in the 1990's. It is practically the use of military forces in law enforcement activities.

Perhaps using a different approach to solve the problem will be easier than creating the correct conditions for a future conflict in the region. For example, it would be possible for U.S. policy maker's to use the money directed to military aid in Colombia in a demand side strategy, a strategy in which the United States will attack the problem fundamentally through education.

Alternatively, it is imperative to create a different atmosphere in the perceptions and misperceptions some countries have in the region. Thus, for the regional status quo to be maintained, initiatives must be developed that are capable of building a stable, cooperative, hemispheric security framework. Hemispheric cooperative security could be defined as "a system of inter-states interactions which, by coordinating government policies, anticipates and contains threats to national interest and prevents the perception of such threats by the different governments from turning into tensions, crisis, or open confrontations."<sup>153</sup>

## **2. Venezuela Recommendations**

Since the times of independence Venezuelan armed forces were created to liberate but not to conquer. This premise has established part of the foreign policy on the use of Venezuela's armed forces as a sovereignty state. Under the present conditions, the Venezuelan state can take two different approaches.

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<sup>153</sup> Augusto, Varas. Cooperative Hemispheric Security after the Cold War. In *Regional Mechanism and International Security in Latin America*, Edit by Olga, Pellicer. New York: The United States University Press. 1998. p. 11.

According to the theory, the Venezuelan state can take a realistic approach. It is to increase military capabilities due to security concerns. It is to improve training and capabilities in those areas that are at a disadvantage at the moment. Additionally, because the region hegemon is supporting Venezuela's historic confrontational neighbor, it will be straightforward to understand current Venezuelan government alliances with U.S. antagonist countries (i.e., Brazil, Cuba, China, France, Libya, and Iran).

On the contrary, a more liberal recommendation could be made. It is to implement a regime of transparency between both democracies, or to create a bilateral security system which includes improving relations between the armed forces of the region. The next step would be to have a transparent relationship regime, or in other words, a relationship that is highly focused on internal problems and avoids ambiguous purposes (i.e., buying tanks to fight guerrillas or MIG-29's to replace fighters), which could be a way to avoid misperceptions that inevitably lead to a spiral model.

Finally, I will make a more conservative suggestion. It is to increase bilateral discussions on the demarcation of maritime limits. Efforts to solve delimitations coming from true liberal democracies will produce positive results for both countries. Essentially, the solution to diminish the likelihood of military conflict is to solve the historical territorial dispute.



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